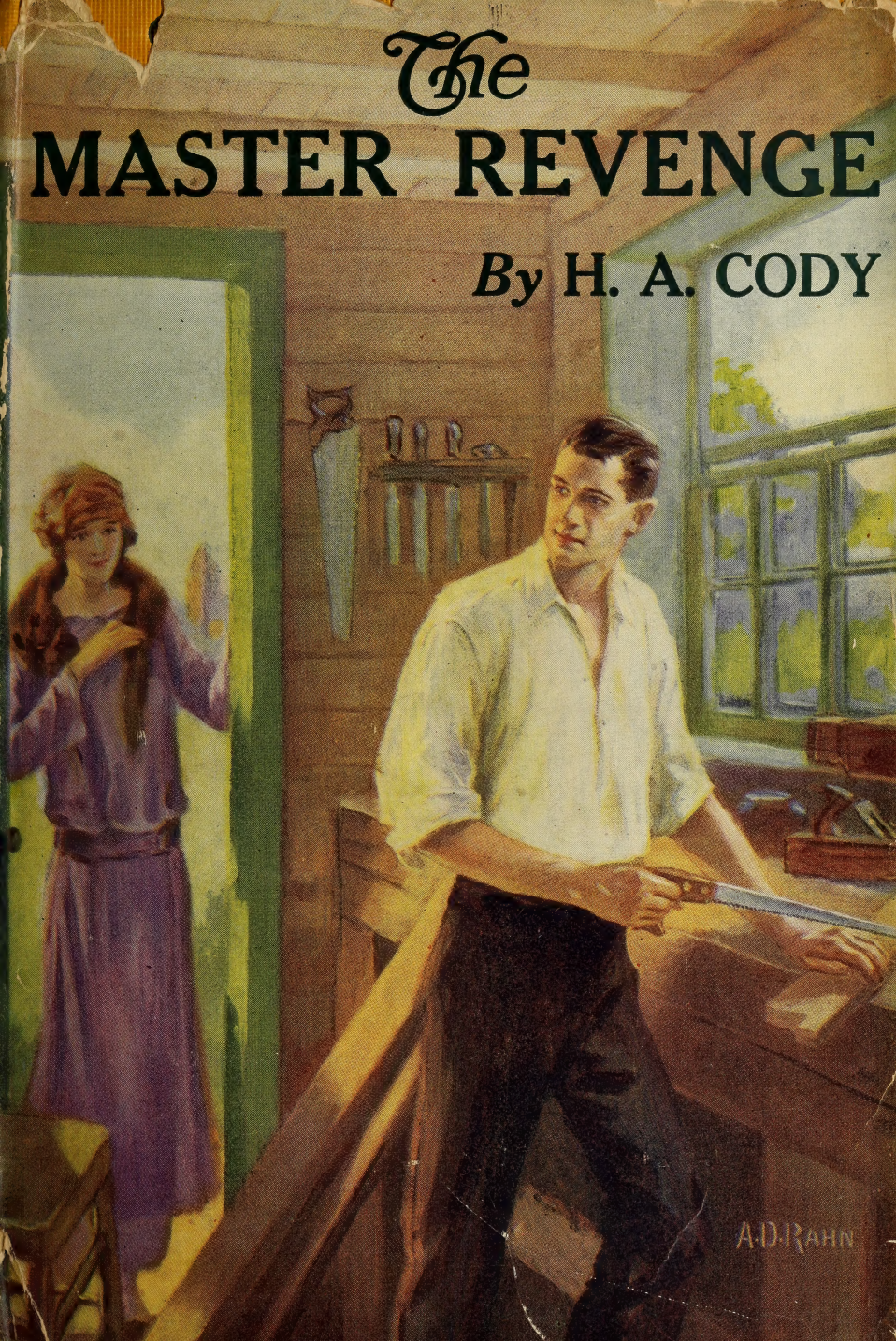
The MASTER REVENGE

By H. A. CODY



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The Master Revenge

H. A. CODY

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THE MASTER REVENGE
THE TRAIL OF THE GOLDEN HORN
THE KING'S ARROW
JESS OF THE REBEL TRAIL
GLEN OF THE HIGH NORTH
THE TOUCH OF ABNER
THE UNKNOWN WRESTLER
UNDER SEALED ORDERS
IF ANY MAN SIN
THE CHIEF OF THE RANGERS
THE FOURTH WATCH
THE LONG PATROL
ROD OF THE LONE PATROL
THE FRONTIERSMAN

THE MASTER REVENGE

BY

H. A. CODY

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THE MASTER REVENGE
—C—
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FOR YOU

Who have eyes that see,
Who have souls that understand,
Who have hearts that pardon,

This book is written.

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The Master Revenge

"There is no revenge so complete
as forgiveness."—*H. W. Shaw*

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:
But I say unto you, That ye revenge not evil."
—*The Master*

THE MASTER REVENGE

CHAPTER 1

Silent Expression

THE warm June day was drawing to a close, and the sun was hanging low over the far-off western horizon. Not a breath of wind stirred the quivering air, and the mirror-like river reflected the trees along the shore. The birds chirped and twittered, and the drowsy hum of insects sounded on all sides. There was a restful peace on water and land. Nature was in her gentlest mood, and harmony reigned supreme.

A man standing beneath the wide-spreading branches of a great patriarchal oak surveyed the entrancing scene with kindling eyes. He was a powerfully-built man, clad in rough work-a-day clothes. He presented a striking appearance as he stood there, his flowing beard and mass of iron-gray hair enhancing the effect. He leaned slightly upon an axe with which he had been chopping, while at his feet lay a newly cut piece of ground-ash. But his mind had wandered from his work, and, like a thirsty man, he was drinking into his soul the beauty surrounding him.

"And for twelve years I missed all that," he at length murmured. "Twelve years!"

His right hand clutched hard the butt of his axe handle, and an angry expression crept into his eyes. For

a few seconds the memory of the past had blotted out the joy of the present. He believed that he had steeled his heart to forget forever the degrading bondage of those twelve years. But now he knew that he had not fully succeeded. The iron had gone too far into his soul to be healed by a few months of freedom.

The sound of children's voices aroused him, and turning quickly around toward the river, he saw a small boat coming upstream quite close to the shore. A woman was rowing, and seated astern were two small children. Not wishing to be seen, the man stepped aside into a thicket of bushes to wait until the boat should pass. This did not take long, and as it cut through the water just abreast of the big oak, the hidden man gave a great start, and only with difficulty suppressed an exclamation of astonishment. He had caught sight of the woman's face, and heard her speak to the children.

"We must go back now," she was saying. "We have come quite a distance, so must get home before dark."

"Let us go ashore near that big tree," one of the children suggested. "It's such a nice-looking place."

"No, dear, not now," the woman replied. "We can come another day and have our supper here. How would you like that?"

"Oh, great!" This from both children. "And will daddy come, too?"

"Perhaps so."

The woman swung the boat around, and began to row downstream with long steady strokes. The man among the bushes watched her until she could no longer be seen. He was trembling with excitement, and the perspiration stood out in beads upon his forehead. At

length his tense body relaxed, and he sank down upon a fallen tree by his side. His eyes still stared after the receding boat and remained in that direction long after it had disappeared from view. At last he rose to his feet, picked up the ash stick, threw it over his left shoulder, and with axe in hand, walked slowly away from the shore. Reaching a path, he followed this until he came to a clearing, and in view of a small house beyond. Not once did he look at the steadily-increasing glory of the western sky, and the beauties of nature appealed to him no longer. Something of far greater importance filled his mind and soul, making him oblivious of all else.

The house toward which he was slowly moving nestled on a gentle elevation commanding a good view of the river. It was partly surrounded by tall fir and spruce trees, thus forming an excellent protection from the severe winds of winter. As a rule the man always gazed with admiration upon the building which was the work of his own hands. Sometimes he would pause for a few minutes to note its neat proportions, and the snug verandah where it was his custom to sit on warm evenings. But now he did not notice the house as he walked up the path, opened the door and entered. The air inside seemed exceptionally close, so he hurried outside again, and paced rapidly up and down the gravel walk in front of the building. This he did until darkness enshrouded the land. He then went back into the house, lighted a lamp and sat down before a small table containing several books, writing-paper, pen and ink. Here he remained for a while in deep thought. At length he seized the pen, and with feverish haste began to write:

"I am strangely stirred to-night, so must give ex-

pression to the thoughts which agitate my mind and soul. There is no one to whom I can speak, and none would understand if I did. To put my feelings upon paper may give me some relief—it is the only thing I can do.

"I saw Helen to-night after twelve long years. She had no idea that I was watching her as she sat in the boat with her two little ones. Most likely she has forgotten me, and long ago ceased to care whether I am dead or alive. But I have never forgotten her, and during my years of bondage she was ever before me. She does not seem to have changed much in that time, judging by the glimpse I had of her this evening. She bore herself with that same regal grace as when I knew her, and her voice was as musical as ever. But how I long to look into her eyes, and see if the same old expression is there such as I remember that last night I was with her, and left her standing among the flowers at the gate of her home."

The man ceased writing, and gazed off into space. He then laid down the pen, rose to his feet, and paced up and down the small room. After a while he resumed his seat, and continued:

"I never committed the crime with which I was charged. God knows I had no knowledge of it whatsoever. But a strange combination of circumstances placed the blame upon me, and I was convicted. I did the best I could for the Trust Company where I was employed, and was making rapid progress. I enjoyed my work, and looked eagerly forward to the time when I could ask Helen to become my wife. I believe that she loved me, and would have been glad to share life's lot with me. But when the money was missing, and a large amount it was, I was at once

suspected. I had gone to Standridge for a brief holiday. It was there I was arrested the day after my arrival, and several of the missing bonds were found in one of my grips. How they got there I never knew, and perhaps never will. But I am going to try to find out, and do all that I can to solve the mystery and clear my name. The evidence was strong against me, and I could say nothing in my own defence except my past good record. The sentence was a stiff one, but the judge who pronounced it was a hard man, and showed no mercy. This was strange, as Ned Preston, his own son, worked with me, and we were roommates. And it was Ned who married Helen! I knew that he wanted her, but he had no chance, so I believed, against me. She told me over and over again that she did not care for the fellow, and I was not surprised at that. He was the most conceited man I ever met, and hard to endure for any length of time. He was a boaster and a great spendthrift, and his father often had to send him money. He led a fast life, and when I once warned him, he told me to mind my own business and he would mind his. Anyway, he has succeeded, and is now a leading man in the city, and Helen is his wife, while I am a jail-bird! He has everything to live for, the respect of all, and a home with loved ones there. And what have I, who tried to do my duty and live an honest life? Nothing but a few acres of land, and a house where I eat and sleep, but which never resounds with voices of happy children, and where no one awaits my coming home. Oh, it is hard! And yet I am used to hardness. I have steeled my heart to endure until my aim in life is accomplished and I clear myself from the black stigma that rests upon me.

"Although my life at the Penitentiary was hard, yet there were compensations. At first Helen wrote to me quite often. She believed that I was innocent, and that was a great comfort. Then her letters suddenly ceased. I can never forget the agony of those days of waiting for her messages which never came. I cannot fully describe the loneliness of my cell when for hours I would lie awake and think, until at times I was almost like a madman. Often I beat with my fists against my cell door. Why I did so I do not know, but those who have experienced what I have will understand the terrible insane feeling which comes over one locked for hours in a silent cell, with none to speak to, and his own despairing thoughts for company.

"At that time there were two things which kept me from either going stark mad or developing into a caged beast. One was the letters I received from my parents. They believed in me, and until they died they wrote me noble words of encouragement. May God bless them! The other, was my work. I learned the carpenter trade, and became quite efficient. I always liked to work with wood, even when a child. I hold firmly to the opinion that it is one of the noblest of the trades. Was not the Great Master Himself a carpenter and worked in His father's shop? A carpenter is not only a builder but a repairer, and Christ was both, as His wonderful life of teaching and service shows. It was some comfort to me to feel that the Great Carpenter suffered, who was much more innocent than myself. I often thought of all this as I worked at the bench and tried hard to follow His example of noble patience and forgiveness. But I am afraid that I often came far short of the ideal. And I feel so now after

years of struggle, especially so since I looked upon Helen's face to-night, and old memories came flooding through my mind with the realization of what I have lost in life.

"And all the time I thought of Helen. I tried to believe that she had not forgotten, that she had written, but her letters had gone astray. It is wonderful how a desperate man will cling to the slightest hope. But it was all I had, so cling I did until I received word that she was married. The newspaper account of the wedding was sent to me in an envelope, but who sent it I never knew. I cannot think it was Helen, for such cruelty was not in her make-up. It must have been an enemy who wished to add to my bitterness. The wedding account was a long one, and told in detail about the bride, and how beautiful she looked as she stood at the altar rail. I did not need the paper to tell me that, for it was impossible for Helen to look anything else but beautiful. The description of the groom was most flattering. He was Judge Preston's only son, a young man who occupied a prominent position in the business world, and a great favorite in social circles.

"I do not remember much what happened during the weeks that followed the reception of this news. I was like a man dazed, beyond all power of thought. But gradually my mind cleared, and a new feeling possessed me. The uncertainty was ended, and Helen could never be mine. And yet there was some comfort in the thought that although she had married Ned Preston she did not really belong to him but to me. I dreamed of her at night, and through the day she was with me more than ever. I have never been able to understand why this was so although I have meditated upon it a great deal. Perhaps Helen was think-

ing of me as I was thinking of her, and in some mysterious way our souls were in sweet communion. Anyway, I received much consolation which helped me to endure my tedious bondage.

"About this time I turned my attention to earnest reading and study. I had always been fond of books, but in my solitude I found in them a great source of light and inspiration such as I had never experienced before. There was a fairly good libary in the Penitentiary, and I, like the other prisoners, was allowed to have one book at a time in my cell. Sundays, which hitherto had been almost unbearable, now became a pleasure, and I read to my heart's content. Numerous books I read, but my chief delight was in the Bible, and I wondered why I had so long neglected that marvellous volume. It was there that I first learned of God's wonderful dealings with man, the final triumph of the just and the overthrow of the wicked. As a boy I had often been advised to read and study the Bible, but had always scoffed at the idea. To me it was a most uninteresting Book, of no practical use in life. Now I see where I was wrong, although it took years of suffering to open my eyes to the light. It is my daily joy and companion now, and I bless my imprisonment for that.

"And next to the Bible came Emerson's Essays. When I first read them I called myself a fool for having overlooked them for so long. There are several I know almost by heart, such as 'Self Reliance,' 'Compensation,' and 'Courage.' How they braced my moral fibre I cannot fully describe.

"I also read the 'Life' of Dante, and some of his works. What appealed to me most of all was his great love for Beatrice. His case was similiar to my

own. He loved her, and yet he lost her, for she married another. How well I remember these words of his:

'When I had lost the first delight of my soul I remained so pierced with sadness that no comforts availed me anything, yet after some time my mind sought to return to the method by which other disconsolate ones had sought consolation, and I set myself to read that little known book of Boetius in which he consoled himself when a prisoner and an exile.'

"Thus I found in Dante a soul akin to my own. He plummed all the depths of misery, and yet his great love for his lost Beatrice was like a burning and a shining light, as my love for Helen has been to me.

"At last the day came when I was given my freedom. To me life in the bustling city was abhorrent. My mind craved the quietness of the country. With a little money which had been lying for years in a bank, I bought this place by the river. I had a special reason for settling here, for about two miles away the Prestons have their summer home. Thus from time to time I might be able to see Helen. My beard, which I have allowed to grow, makes a good disguise, and as John Stone, the carpenter, she would never recognize me as Nathan Strong, the man she once knew, and, I think, loved. The people here are friendly and kind, so I have plenty of work to do. If they knew that I am a jail-bird it might make a difference. But that is a secret which I shall keep until the time when the mystery of those stolen bonds is cleared up, if ever that shall be. When I have made some money I hope to begin the task, but just how I shall go about it I do not know. But I am determined to do all in my power to clear my name and bring the

guilty ones to justice. Anyway, I am near Helen at last. I did not know until this evening that she was in the neighborhood. I must see her again, but when and where? I can hardly contain myself. I want to look closer at her, to behold her face and those wonderful eyes of hers. If I should unexpectedly meet her, I wonder how I should act. But I must control myself, and never let her know that John Stone is anything more to her than a humble carpenter."

The writing suddenly ceased, and the man rose abruptly from his chair. A smile overspread his face as he gazed down upon the sheets of paper lying upon the table.

"There, I have unburdened my soul," he commented with a sigh. "Perhaps it was foolish, but it seemed as if I were speaking to someone. It is done, anyway, so that is the end of it."

He reached out, seized the sheets in his right hand, crushed them together, and tossed them into a box near the table. He then went out upon the verandah, and drank in great draughts of the fresh night air. The sky was cloudless, and silence lay upon river and land. He looked to the right in the direction of the Preston house, and his sole thought was of her, who, though near, was yet so far away.

CHAPTER 2

Mutual Need

ADJOINING his house Nathan Strong had built his workshop, and here he spent most of his time when at home. It was a cosy place and he liked to be here. The people of the neighborhood were glad to have a skilled carpenter in their midst, and supplied him with plenty of work. There were many things to make and repair, from axe handles and whiffle-trees to doors, windows, cupboards and lockers. Even broken woodboxes were sent to him, and occasionally a baby's crib or high chair. He enjoyed doing such work, and as his prices were always moderate, the people were satisfied.

The morning after his silent confession he entered his shop later than usual. He had not slept well during the night, he felt somewhat tired. A peculiar indifference possessed him, and he did not care whether he worked or idled. Life seemed unusually barren to him this morning, and the tide of hope flowed low. He was feeling the reaction from his excitement of the previous evening. He missed the imperative prison urge which for years had driven him forward to his daily tasks. Now he could do just as he wished, and his wish this morning was to do nothing. What reason was there for him to work except to earn enough for his daily wants? He had only himself to consider,

and no one was depending upon him. What did it matter, anyway, whether he lived or died?

He thought of these things as he turned mechanically toward a partly-finished cupboard. He was making it for his neighbors, the Martins up the road, as payment for farm produce he had obtained from them. They had been exceptionally good to him, so he wished to make as fine a cupboard as possible. He had never made such a thing before, but he was fashioning this according to one he well remembered in his old home. The recollection of the past swept upon him as he thought of how his mother had always kept her pies, cakes and frosted doughnuts stored away in that old cupboard. What a wonderful and mysterious place that always was to him, especially at Christmas. How happy all were in the dear old home, and never did he then dream of the trouble that lay ahead. He thought of his parents, and how their hearts were broken through his imprisonment, although he was sure that they believed him to be innocent. His right hand clutched hard upon the hammer he was holding, and a scornful expression appeared upon his face. Where was the justice of which men boasted? he asked himself. Why should an innocent man be punished for the guilt of others, and saintly people, such as his parents, have their gray heads bowed with sorrow? He knew that in his old home village his name was a byword of scorn, and that parents held him up as a warning to their children. And his father and mother had silently endured that for years! But he would clear his name. He would unravel the mystery and prove to the world that he had been wrongly treated. Yes, that was something to live for. The good old

name of Strong, which hitherto had been the watchword of honor, would again be vindicated.

This resolve aroused him from his lethargy to a brisk activity, and he set earnestly to work upon the cupboard. Every nail he drove home, and every swish of the plane spoke of his intense energy. He was a new man now, with his indifference of an hour before gone.

It was about the middle of the forenoon when Nathan heard a peculiar sound outside, which resembled children's voices, mingled with a strange grating noise. Stepping to the door, he saw a boy leading a little girl with one hand while with the other he was pulling a small waggon. The two rear wheels were gone, thus causing the tail end of the vehicle to drag upon the ground. The girl was whimpering, and the boy was doing his best to comfort her. He was hot and tired, but bore up bravely against his difficulties.

"Don't cry, Doris," he was saying. "I can't haul you in the waggon. Don't you see it is broken? The carpenter will fix it up for us, and then I can haul you home."

Seeing Nathan standing in the doorway, his face brightened, and he hurried forward.

"Hello! had an accident?" Nathan asked.

"Yep. Bust two wheels. Will you fix 'em?"

"Where are they?"

"In there," and the boy motioned to the waggon. "Mum said she guessed you can fix anyhing, so that's why we're here."

Nathan at once examined the waggon with critical eyes.

"Ah, I see," he remarked. "The axle is broken; that's the trouble."

"Can you fix it?" the boy eagerly inquired.

"Oh, I think so, though it will take me quite a while. Suppose I patch it up now, and you can come again in the morning when I shall have more time. I must get a couple of bolts at the store."

"Will it cost much?"

"No, I guess not."

"Will five cents do? That's all I've got."

"Yes, that will be plenty, perhaps too much."

Nathan meant what he said. He loved children, and he longed to have them always about him. But hitherto not one had ever come to his house, although he had often talked with them when he met them on the road, and they all knew him as their friend. But now a start had been made, and this little lad had come to him for assistance. It was the day for which he had been eagerly waiting, and he was determined to make the most of it. He believed that children should be treated in the right manner, and that it was wrong to deal with them in the spirit of superior condescension. He had seen too much of that at the Penitentiary. He knew how galling it was to listen to the remarks of well-intentioned but mistaken people as they talked to the prisoners who were at their mercy. And he believed that children's resentment was just as keen. He often recalled his own humiliation when a child at people who smiled good-naturedly at his words, and patted his head. He had resented their superior airs, and was certain that they did not know much. This lad was now before him. He had approached him in a straight-forward, business-like way, and so deserved every consideration. He offered to pay all that he was able, and could anyone do more? When Nathan said

that perhaps five cents was too much he was in earnest. How willing he would have been to pay for the privilege of having children come to him in their time of need. His soul called out for them. Their talk was the sweetest of music in his ears, and their graceful and unstudied movements appealed to his artistic nature.

In a few minutes the little girl's tears were dried, and she was upon the floor of the workshop lost in the wonders of the shavings and several pieces of the sawn-off ends of boards. With these she played to her heart's content, and ere long her brother joined her. Seeing how delighted they were with such things, Nathan sawed for them a heap of blocks, and cleared a space on the floor where they could build houses and wonderful structures of all kinds. He then turned his attention to the broken axle. He was in no hurry to mend this, as he wished to keep the children with him as long as possible. It was midday when at last it was finished, and reluctantly he told the boy that it would serve for a while.

"Perhaps you had better go now," he said. "Your mother will be anxious about you. But come again in the morning and I shall have a new axle ready."

At once the boy rose to his feet, fumbled in his trouser's pocket, and brought forth a five-cent piece. This he handed forth.

"Will the new axle cost more'n that?" he asked. "If it will, Mum will let me have some more."

"No, no, this will be plenty," Nathan assured.

"But you have to get the bolts at the store."

"This will be enough, so do not worry."

Nathan took the coin, and as his hand closed over

it, a peculiar feeling swept through his being. He longed to give it back, but decided to keep it. He wanted that coin very much. To him it was almost a sacred thing, of more value than many dollars. It was to him the outward symbol of the innocent trust and simplicity of a little lad. He was determined never to part with that money, the first he had ever received from a child.

After the children had gone, with their waggon well-filled with blocks, and Doris perched on top, Nathan stood for some time at the door of his shop holding the five-cent piece in his hand. At length he turned, went into the house, and brought down a small box from a shelf above the kitchen table. This he opened and dropped in the coin among a few trinkets he had always preserved as precious mementoes of the past. After that, he prepared and ate his dinner. At times he glanced up at the box, and a tender light shone in his eyes. Thus in a most unexpected manner he had found something real to live for, and his heart was happier than it had been years.

Nathan did some work that afternoon upon the cupboard, but part of the time he was busy making a new axle for the waggon. He knew the exact measurements, and he chose a well-seasoned piece of wood for his purpose. Only the best must be used, and he shaped and carved it with the greatest care. He smoothed out every uneven spot with the spoke-shave, and then sandpapered the wood until it was as smooth as velvet. He fitted on the wheels, and tested them most critically to make sure that they revolved true. He spent much more than time, labor and skill upon that little axle. He put into it his heart; the best that

was in him, and, perhaps, for no one but a little child would Nathan, the carpenter, have done such a thing.

That evening he went to the store, and bought two bolts. But his purchase did not end there, for he bought also a pound of the choicest chocolates he could obtain. The storekeeper eyed him curiously as he wrapped up the box.

"Getting a sweet tooth all of a sudden, Mr. Stone?" he asked.

Nathan pretended not to hear as he seized the package, left the building, and hurried down the road. He was really embarrassed, and his heart beat fast. But there was compensation in the thought of the joy that would come in the morning when two little ones would again visit him.

He sat for some time that night upon the verandah, smoking, and gazing thoughtfully out upon the river. He was in a happy frame of mind. A vision of two small curly heads was ever before him, and childish voices sounded in his ears. They needed him, the jail-bird, and they had come to him for assistance. He was of some use in the world, after all. The thought thrilled his soul. As a carpenter, his neighbors naturally needed him, but not in the same sense as did those little ones. They gave him something which he valued far more than anything else.

Before going to bed that night, Nathan rescued the crumpled sheets of paper from the box where he had carelessly tossed them. He smoothed them out with considerable care, and read the words he had written the previous evening. As he finished, he picked up his pen.

"I have at last found something real to live for," he wrote. "Children have sought me out. They need

me, and I need them. To-day I mended a little broken waggon and in doing so I myself have been greatly helped."

This time Nathan did not crumple up the sheets of paper, but left them in full view upon the table.

CHAPTER 3

An Accident

NATHAN was at work early the next morning. His step was brisk, and his every movement spoke of alertness. He even whistled softly as he gave the finishing touches to the cupboard. This was something unusual for him. But his heart was light, for were not the children coming to see him again? The package of chocolates was lying on the window-sill just back of the work-bench, that it might be handy when needed. When a couple of hours had passed and the children had not arrived, he wondered what could be keeping them. He listened intently to every sound, and several times went to the door and looked out. Once he left the shop and stood watching up the road, expecting to see them appear at any minute. But when no sign of them could be seen, he walked slowly and thoughtfully back. Perhaps they would not come at all, he mused. Something else might have attracted their attention, or their mother might have decided that the waggon would do as it was without a new axle. He knew Mrs. Watters, a widow, by sight, and that Tom and Doris were her only children.

When midday arrived and the little ones had not come, Nathan was certain that he would not see them that day, and he was greatly disappointed. He longed to know the reason, and as he ate his dinner, he was partly tempted to go to Mrs. Watters' house, take the

axle he had made, and place it on the waggon there. He would have a good excuse for doing so, he reasoned, and surely the widow could not object. He would thus find out, at any rate, why the children had not come back.

He had just returned to his workshop, when the patter of bare feet was heard outside, and the next minute Tom stood in the doorway. He was panting heavily, and his eyes were big and red. Instantly Nathan knew that something was wrong, and the plane he was holding in his hand dropped upon the work-bench.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"D-doris is hurt!" the boy gasped. "Broke her leg!"

"Broke her leg!" Nathan exclaimed. "How?"

"Gettin' over the fence. A pole rolled on top of her."

"Where is she now?"

"Home. Mum phoned fer the doctor, an' he's comin' as fast as he can."

"But why did you come for me?"

" 'Cause Doris wants you. She says you can do anything, an' can mend her leg as ye did the waggon."

"Oh, I see." Nathan looked keenly at the lad, and his eyes shone with the light of sympathy. So the little girl wanted him! She had more faith in him than she did in the doctor. His heart thrilled at the thought, and his eyes became somewhat misty.

"Will y' go to see her?" the boy asked.

"Certainly," Nathan replied, rousing from his reverie. "I shall go with you at once."

He was about to close the door of his shop, when he noticed the package of chocolates upon the window-sill. This he seized, pulled the door to after him, and accompanied the boy out upon the road.

"I knew y'd come," Tom remarked after they had gone a short distance.

"Why?"

" 'Cause you was so good to us yesterday. Doris talked a lot about you, an' she played with her blocks until bedtime. Too bad, isn't it, that she's hurt?"

"It is. But the doctor will soon make her all right again."

"Yep, maybe so, but it'll cost a lot," and the boy sighed. "I just don't know how Mum'll pay him. It's as much as she can do now to make both ends meet, so she says. Oh, I wish I was a man."

Nathan glanced down at the little fellow trudging bravely along at his side. He noted the clenched sunburned hands, and the look of determination upon his face.

"How old are you, lad?" he asked.

"Six last August. When I'm seven I can do a lot. I'm goin' to pick blueberries when they get ripe. We have a fine patch out in our pasture. But I'll miss Doris a lot, fer she always went with me."

"How old is Doris?"

"She's four. But she's great company out there among the bushes. I never feel one bit afraid when she's along."

"Why is that?"

"Oh, I dunno, 'cept that it makes me brave to feel that I have to take care of her, an' would have to fight fer her if any bears came along. But here we are right at our gate."

Mrs. Watters was bending over Doris as they entered the house, and Tom went at once to his sister's side.

"I've got him, Doris," he announced. "He came with me, an' he's here."

A faint expression of pleasure appeared in the girl's blue eyes as she turned them wistfully upon the visitor. Nathan was unused to a situation such as this, and he did not know what to say. For a few seconds he stood awkwardly in the middle of the room. He then stepped quickly forward and held out the package he was holding in his hand.

"You like chocolates, don't you?" he asked. "These are all for you."

"Oh!" It was all that the child said as she seized the treasure and hugged it close to her breast. Her suffering was too great for her to attempt to do more. Nathan then turned to Mrs. Watters who was standing silently by.

"I am very sorry that Doris has met with this accident," he began. "I suppose the doctor will be here soon."

"I am expecting him at any minute," was the quiet reply. "But Doris wanted to see you first, and it is so good of you to come. She and Tom had a most pleasant time at your place yesterday, and Doris was looking forward to going again this morning, but, poor child, I am afraid it will be many weeks before she can do that."

"Is there anything that I can do for her?" Nathan inquired.

"Nothing, except to come to see her as often as you can. But there's the doctor now. His car is at the door."

With a word to Doris, telling her to be brave and that he would be back again soon, Nathan hurried out of the house, passing the doctor on the way. He walked rapidly down the road, his thoughts in a whirl.

He felt that he should have stayed to assist the doctor, if necessary. But he could not stand to see the suffering of a little child. In the case of a man it would have been different.

There was something, however, that he felt he could do. When he reached home he set earnestly to work, and began to carve out a doll from a piece of dry cedar. He knew exactly how to do this, for his training at the Penitentiary had made him most efficient. But he worked now with a care and interest such as he had never exhibited before. It was really a wonderful head and face he made, and he was quite satisfied when he was through and held it at arm's length for a final inspection. That evening by the light on the kitchen table he dressed the doll, and he was very busy at this when his neighbor, Peter Martin, called. The latter's eyes expressed surprise as he limped toward the chair Nathan offered.

"Well! Well!" he exclaimed, as he placed his old felt hat upon the floor by his side, "I never knew before that ye could do sich work as that."

"How does it look?" Nathan asked, holding up the doll.

"Great! An' ye've got her all dressed up, too, jist like a fashion-plate. It's fer some wee gal, I s'pose."

"Yes, I'm making it for Mrs. Watters' little child. No doubt you have heard about the accident."

"Indeed I have. It's too bad. Poor Widder Watters is havin' a hard time of it, an' this'll make it worse fer her. She's got two nice children, an' she looks after 'em well, stays at home an' minds her own business, which is more'n many do."

"Doris is a sweet child, Mr. Martin, and I am very fond of her. I believe she will like this doll, though

I wish I had some better material for the dress. I couldn't find anything that would do except a couple of colored handkerchiefs."

"Ye've done well, though," Peter complimented. "Martha could let ye have some suitable stuff, fer she's plenty of odds an' ends about the house. In fact, that's about all we've got these days. I s'pose ye wouldn't mind makin' a doll like that fer my little lass? She'd go almost daft over it."

"Why, I shall be delighted to make her one," Nathan replied. "But I'm afraid I won't have time for several days, as I expect to be very busy."

"Oh, that reminds me why I came over here," and Peter shuffled somewhat impatiently on his chair as he spoke. "It's a message from Ned Preston. I was comin' by his place this afternoon, when he saw me, an' asked me to tell ye to go down an' fix his fence which was broken last winter."

Nathan glanced up quickly from his work, and looked keenly at his visitor.

"When did the Prestons move from the city?" he asked as calmly as possible.

"Jist a few days ago. They're earlier than usual this year."

"How did Mr. Preston know about me?"

"He didn't until I told him. He wanted me to go an' fix his fence, jist think of that! I tell ye, I felt like givin' him a piece of my mind. But I kept cool an' told him I'd speak to you about doin' the job."

"Why did you feel like giving Mr. Preston a piece of your mind? Do you not care for him?"

"Care fer him!" Peter almost roared the words. "I guess if ye knew what he did to me, ye'd know how much I care fer him. Look at that, now," and he

touched his right knee with his hand. That's what I got by workin' fer Ned Preston."

"Why, what did he have to do with your lameness?"

"Didn't I ever tell ye?"

"You never did. I often wondered, but as it was none of my business I did not care to ask you."

"Well, I'd soon told ye if ye had. It was due to Ned Preston, let me tell ye that. Five winters ago I lumbered fer him, an' cut the finest logs on me place. He agreed to give me fifteen dollars a thousand fer 'em rafted. I had several men choppin' all winter, an' fed 'em, too. It cost me a big sum, but I reckoned I'd clear up about two thousand dollars on the work. I hauled the logs to the brow myself, an' attended to the drive an' brought down every stick. But the last day I slipped an' a log jammed my knee. It laid me up fer almost a year, an' I've been lame ever since. That's what it did."

"But how was Preston to blame for that?" Nathan questioned, as Peter paused and searched in his pockets for his pipe.

"Oh, he wasn't to blame fer that, but the way he served me afterwards. My men rafted the logs, the tug came fer 'em an' took 'em to the city. But would Preston pay me the fifteen dollars he agreed to? Not a bit of it. He denied that he had ever offered me that amount, so all he would give me was seven dollars a thousand."

"It was only a verbal agreement, then?"

"That was all. I didn't have the scratch of a pen."

"You made a big mistake."

"I sure did, an' paid fer it, too. I sued Preston, an' lost. He had money an' false witnesses on his side, so what could I do? I lost not only the two thousand

dollars comin' to me, but I had to sell a fine timber tract to pay the lawyers, an' square up a number of bills on my winter's work. I was lucky to save me place."

"Preston made well out of those logs, I suppose."

"I should say he did. He makes money on everything he touches. If he can't git it one way, he will another. That man will stop at nuthin'. I could tell ye of some other mean, contemptible tricks he has served upon people. But I must git along now. Martha wants me to fix the kitchen stove while the fire is out. I shouldn't be here now, but thought I'd better run over with that message from Preston. I called early this afternoon, but ye wasn't home."

"When does Preston want me to go?" Nathan asked.

"As soon as ye can. He always wants people to hop when he speaks."

"Well, I'm not going to hop, anyway. I shall think it over, and if I decide to go, it will not be for a day or two. I have some work to do to-morrow for Mr. Sanderson."

"Very well, suit yerself," and Peter rose slowly to his feet. "I really wouldn't have brought that message but fer Mrs. Preston. She was standin' by her husband's side when he spoke to me, an' she looked at me with them wonderful eyes of hers in sich a way that I couldn't very well refuse. So when I promise to do a thing, I try to do it."

"The influence of women, eh?"

"It was the influence of Mrs. Preston, an' not her husband, that's one thing sure. Why, everybody loves her as much as they hate him. It's been a problem to me how she ever came to marry a thing like that. She's beautiful, an' as innocent as a child; ye can tell

that at the first glance, while he's—oh, well, I guess I'd better not say all I know about him. He's a stranger to you, so maybe I shouldn't have told ye what I have. But I couldn't help it to-night. The Parson is always tellin' us what the Bible says about fergivin' our enemies, an' no doubt he's right, an' we should fergive if we expect to be fergiven. But when I see a man like Ned Preston struttin' around, doin' dirty things, an' gittin' off with 'em, makin' money hand over fist, and called a prominent citizen, its mighty hard to keep still. I want to do what is right, live an' let live, but my religion is often strained to the breaking point."

Peter picked up his hat and limped slowly to the door. He paused at the threshold and looked back.

"Ye won't fergit to make that doll fer my little lass, will ye?" he asked. "I'll pay ye well fer it."

"No, I won't forget, Mr. Martin. "Your daughter shall have it as soon as possible."

Nathan sat for a long time that evening, lost in thought. So Ned Preston wanted him to fix his fence! But why should he do such a thing? He did not have to go, and yet there was a longing to look upon the face of the man he had not seen for years. And he might see Helen, too. He was certain that she would not recognize him in his disguise. But could he remain calm and natural in her presence, just as if she meant nothing to him? Yes, for her sake he would go. He wanted to meet her, so it might as well be now as later.

He mused also upon Preston's career. It had been a most unenviable one, and yet he had prospered while others who had done no wrong were forced to suffer. Was there any justice in that? There suddenly flashed into his mind certain words over which he had often pondered, and going into the next room he brought

out his well-worn Bible. This he opened at the thirty-seventh Psalm, and began to read:

"Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed."

He thus read verse after verse wherein the promise of reward is set forth to them that do right, but severe punishment to them that do wrong. He paused at the thirty-sixth verse, and then read with intense interest, and as he read, a new light and meaning flooded his mind.

"I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away; yea I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.

"Great words," Nathan commented, as he reverently closed the Book. "No doubt they are very true, and that all things will come out right at last. But my faith, like Peter's, is strained at times almost to the breaking point. Anyway, I am not going to give up altogether until I see if those words are applicable to the career of Ned Preston.

CHAPTER 4

Comrades in Distress

WHEN Nathan called at Mrs. Watters' house the next morning on his way to work, he had with him the doll carefully wrapped up in paper. The widow met him at the door, and gave him a bright smile of welcome.

"Doris is resting quite comfortably," she informed him in response to his question concerning the child. "She has been asking for you, and is eagerly awaiting your coming."

She then conducted him into the room where the little one was lying. The latter's eyes brightened when she saw the visitor, and a flush of pleasure mantled her cheeks.

"Feeling better?" Nathan asked as he sat down by her side.

"Some," was the shy reply. "Tandy was dood."

"Was it? I'm glad to know that. Have you eaten it all?"

"Not all. Mum an' Tom eat some."

"Have you a doll, Doris?"

"I had one time, but it's gone now."

Carefully and slowly Nathan unwrapped the parcel, and then held up the doll before the child's big staring eyes.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, as her hands reached out and clutched the treasure.

"For me?" she murmured.

"Yes, for you. It is to be your very own."

"Did oo make it?"

"I did, and dressed it, too. But you can make a nicer dress if you like."

"I like dis dress, oh, so much," and the girl hugged the doll close to her breast.

Nathan was satisfied, and as he left the house after Mrs. Watters had thanked him for his kindness, life seemed very pleasant. In fact, all through the day as he worked at Mr. Sanderson's barn there was joy in his heart. His deed of kindness to a little suffering child had transformed the world to him. And as he walked home after supper the sky appeared brighter, and the wild flowers along the way more beautiful than ever. His step was lighter, and he held his head very erect.

From this region of enchantment he was suddenly brought back to earth when he reached Bill Tooke's house. It was a ramshackle abode close to the highway, the ground surrounding it being littered with refuse, from rags to battered tin cans. Bill himself was a useless creature, a menace to the community. He did a few odd jobs now and again, fished a little, hunted and trapped in season and out. His two acres of starved land produced a meagre supply of hay for his one slab-sided cow, and a few vegetables for his family. He stole anything upon which he could lay his hands, and the neighbors knew it. But they were afraid of him, fearful lest he set fire to their barns and houses should they take action against him. Some, therefore, secured their barns and sheds with strong padlocks, while others kept watch dogs. Bill was a fluent talker,

and justified his manner of living by referring to others who had made their money in questionable ways.

"Look at them big fellers," he would sometimes say. "They don't work with their hands, but jist use their brains to rob others. They git off with it, merchants, contractors, an' politicans alike. They all do it, an' call it 'high finance' or some other name. They have their fine houses, big cars, an' are looked up to as leadin' citizens. That's the way Ned Preston made his money, even though he is a judge's son. The world owes me a livin' jist as much as it does them suckers."

But notwithstanding this course of reasoning, Bill was not able to produce much except a brood of half-naked and half-starved children. Several of these were in front of the house as Nathan drew near. They were deeply interested in some special object, so he stopped to learn what was attracting their attention. He found that it was a red squirrel they had captured, and had it confined in a little wooden box. The poor creature was panting with fear, and as Nathan looked upon it through the wire bars, he thought of his own unjust imprisonment. It stirred within him a deep sympathy for the caged animal, so he asked the boys to let it out. But they only grinned, and one lad poked the squirrel with a stick which made it jump to one side of the cage in fright. Nathan was upon the point of taking possession by main force and liberating the animal. But upon second thought, he decided not to do so. Instead, he thrust his hand into a pocket and brought forth a fifty-cent piece. This he held out to the boys.

"I will give you this for the squirrel," he told them.

Eagerly the urchins agreed, and in another minute Nathan was hurrying down the road, carrying the box in his hands. He did not once look back. But had

he done so, he would have seen the Tooke boys in earnest conversation, and had he heard what they were saying, he would have been much disturbed. This incident drove the pleasant thoughts out of his mind, and stirred his heart with indignation. What the boys had done to that squirrel men had done to him. Why were such things permitted? he asked himself. Why should the innocent be forced to suffer? Such thoughts burned in his soul as he sped on his way, heeding no longer the beauty of the flowers, nor the peace upon river and land.

At length he reached his own house, and at the door he placed the box gently upon the ground, and peered in at the trembling captive.

"You poor little creature," he began. "It is no wonder that you are frightened. But you are safe with me, and you shall have your freedom. Surely the world is big enough for us all, so why should we interfere with one another?"

He then opened the door, but the squirrel shrank back.

"Come forth, little comrade," Nathan encouraged, "and enjoy life to the full. You were made for the great open spaces, and not for a cramped box like this."

As if it understood these words, the squirrel crept cautiously to the opening, peered for an instant outside, and then with a rush bounded from its prison, sped across the open space, and scurried nimbly up the nearest tree. It reached a high branch, and there it sat for a few minutes looking keenly down upon the watching man below. Then it opened its mouth and poured forth such a torrent of jargon that Nathan was compelled to laugh outright.

"Hi, there, you little beggar," he cried. "What are

you saying, anyway? You may be thanking me, but it sounds like the biggest scolding I ever got. Keep it up, old fellow, if it will do you any good."

He turned to go into the house, but noticing the cage at his feet, he gave it a savage kick, which smashed it to pieces.

"I wish I could do the same with all such things," he vehemently declared. "And I am going to do what I can."

That night he again picked up his pen and added the following to the partly-filled sheet of paper lying upon his writing-table:

"This has been an eventful day to me. I made a little girl happy this morning, and this evening I rescued a squirrel from its captors and set it free. In doing these two simple deeds I have been wonderfully rewarded, and to-night my heart is filled with a blessed peace. Perhaps my imprisonment has made me very sympathetic for all who are in distress, especially God's helpless little creatures. What greater happiness can I now find in life than continuing such work? There may be many, I feel sure, right around me who need my assistance. My world which I thought was so small, is becoming larger, and my interest in all living things is increasing in a wonderful manner. I can now look forward to each day as a new adventure with many possibilities for doing good. I can thus serve, if I can do nothing else."

Nathan slept well that night, and awoke the next morning fresh and eager for the new duties awaiting him. He had a plow handle to make for Mr. Sanderson, so that would take part of the forenoon. He worked with a hearty goodwill, at times whistling or humming an old familiar tune. He was almost through

with his task, and was vigorously applying the sandpaper, when three of the Tooke boys suddenly appeared at the door. Each carried a box containing a frightened squirrel. Nathan looked at the three grinning lads for a few seconds, and then the meaning of their visit flashed into his mind.

"Why have you brought those squirrels here?" he demanded.

"Fer you t'buy," one of the boys explained. "Ye like squirrels, I guess, so ye kin have these three fer fifty cents a piece."

"I don't want them," Nathan quietly replied. "The one I bought from you last night I let go. Suppose you do the same with these. Let the poor things out."

"Not on yer life, Mister. We want money. If ye won't give us any, we'll kill the squirrels. They're a nuisance."

"In what way are they a nuisance?"

"Oh, they steal things, an' run all over the house, so Ma says."

"Well, then, suppose you let them go here. I don't mind how much they steal from me. I like to have the little fellows around. They can run over my house all they want to."

"Naw, ye can't have 'em. We'll take 'em home an' kill 'em. Their skins make good ear-tabs fer our caps in winter. But we'd rather sell 'em an' git the money."

Nathan realised that it was useless to argue with these boys any longer. Roughness was the only thing they understood, as they had been accustomed to it all their lives.

"Put those boxes down upon the ground," he sternly ordered.

Seeing that the man was in earnest, the boys shrank back, and were about to run away, when Nathan stepped quickly forward, seized the boxes from their hands, and tore open the doors. The next instant the squirrels were free and scampering off among the trees. With cries of rage, the three boys faced the liberator.

"You'll git paid fer this," one of them yelled. "Jist wait till dad gits after ye. He'll fix ye a'right."

"Your dad can come whenever he wants to," Nathan retorted, as he seized a hammer from the bench and smashed the boxes to pieces. "Now, clear out, and don't let me ever hear of you catching squirrels again."

So stern were the words, and so fierce was the carpenter's appearance, that the boys fled rapidly toward the road. There they stopped, shouted back words of defiance, and threw stones at the house, one of which broke a pane of glass. The crash frightened the lads, so they hurried away as fast as their legs could carry them.

Nathan stood for a while in the doorway, gazing in the direction the boys had gone. His eyes glowed with the fire of indignation, and his body trembled from the vehemence of his emotion. He was in no mood for work, so after he had prepared and eaten his dinner, he sat upon the verandah and smoked for some time.

"I forgot one very important thing," he at length mused aloud. "In my ideal for doing good I overlooked the perversity of human nature. I must expect opposition. I have stirred up the Tooke nest, and no doubt the brood will try to come back at me in some underhanded way. But I am not afraid of them, even though their neighbors are. I have only myself to consider, and if Tooke senior goes too far he might

find out his mistake. It would be for the good of the community if the entire bunch could be rooted out."

That afternoon Nathan went up the road to deliver the plow handle to Mr. Sanderson. As he passed the Tooke house he noticed the two little windows facing the highway filled with dirty faces, although no one appeared outside. But as he returned an hour later, Bill Tooke was sitting on a stone by the side of the road. Nathan suspected that the man was waiting for him, and he braced himself for the interview. As he approached, and was about to pass with the customary "good-day," Bill slouched forward and confronted him.

"What about them squirrels an' cages?" he demanded.

"Well, what about them?" Nathan asked.

"Oh, you know, a'right, what ye did to 'em."

"Yes, I do, and I shall do the same to all others that I can get my hands on."

"Is that so? But before ye go any furder, I want ye to pay fer the boxes ye smashed this mornin', an' fer the squirrels, too. I want jist five dollars. That'll settle any difference between you an' me."

"H'm, you'll have to be satisfied with wanting, for not a cent will I pay. Your boys broke a window in my house, so I might very well demand payment for that."

"An' ye'll have more winders broken if ye don't hustle an' hand out that money."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I guess you know, a'right, what I mean. If ye don't want me to smash that mug of yours, ye'd better git a move on."

"Perhaps two can play at that game. But look here,

Mr. Tooke, what's the use of our fighting? Let us settle this matter peaceably."

"Only when ye pay me five dollars will there be peace."

"But suppose I won't pay?"

"Then ye'll have to take the consequences."

"Well, I won't pay, so that's the end of it."

"No, it isn't, by a long chalk," Bill replied with an oath, aiming at the same time a savage blow at Nathan's head.

Although taken by surprise, the latter with a quick movement warded the blow, and in return sent a smashing upper-cut to his assailant's jaw. Bill went down like a log, and lay on the road for a few seconds. He then slowly lifted himself on all fours, and rose unsteadily to his feet. He glared at his opponent, but made no effort to resume the fight.

"Do you want some more of that?" Nathan asked. "If you do, come right along. I'm just getting warmed up."

"Naw, I don't," Bill sullenly replied, as he rubbed his jaw." "I didn't expect ye'd hit like that, h—if I did."

"You thought I would stand here and let you thump me without defending myself, did you? Well, then, you were mistaken, for I am not built that way. You attacked me on the King's highway, and I could have you arrested. But I am not going to do so if you behave yourself. Let us shake hands and be friends."

Nathan held out his right hand, but Bill refused to take it. He slouched off the road and made his way slowly to his house. As he reached the door, he paused, turned around and shook his fist at his enemy.

"Ye got the better of me this time," he roared. "But I'll git ye some day, an' when I do, I'll fix ye."

Nathan made no reply. He had already started down the road, and until he was out of hearing his ears were assailed with oaths, whoops, and yells of defiance from the Tooke brood.

CHAPTER 5

Repairing the Fence

THE Preston house was a large one, surrounded by spacious, well-kept grounds. It was a beautiful spot, the admiration of all who beheld it. There were large trees in abundance, and smaller ones recently planted. A picket fence divided this place from the adjoining lot, which had been seriously damaged by storms the previous winter. The fence had not been properly made at first, and this Nathan at once noted as he began to repair it early Monday morning.

He had looked forward to this work with considerable misgivings. He felt sure that he would meet Helen, and would be forced to speak to her. His beard would disguise his face, but his voice might betray him. That morning as he looked into his small mirror a sudden idea flashed into his mind. He would disguise his voice by affecting a nasal twang, and he would also "murder" the English language. If he did this he was quite certain that Helen would not recognize in John Stone, the carpenter, Nathan Strong, the man who once had meant so much to her.

He had been at work for about an hour when he saw Helen come out of the house with her two children. She looked more charming than on Sunday, so Nathan thought, as his eyes gave her a fleeting glance. Clad in a simple white dress, she seemed almost youthful in appearance. Would she come his way? he wondered,

as he bent his head, and with an unsteady hand drove in a nail. He was not left long in doubt, however, for as soon as the children saw him, they gave a shout of delight and hurried toward him. The mother followed slowly after, stopping on the way to pick a lilac from a bush along the gravel walk. She was inhaling the perfume when she came near to where Nathan was standing. The latter pretended not to see her as he bent to fit a picket into its place. The children were watching him with wide-open eyes. They inherited their mother's beauty in face, eyes and hair. The boy was about six and the girl four. Mrs. Preston smiled upon them, and placed an arm lovingly about her son.

"I am going to be a carpenter when I am a man," the boy declared.

"You might do worse," was the quiet reply. "Don't you think so, Mr. Stone?"

Nathan thus accosted, straightened himself slowly up, and looked into the woman's eyes.

"It's an honest trade, madam," he drawled, "an', as ye say, the boy might do worse."

For a fleeting instant a peculiar expression appeared in the woman's eyes, and a perceptible color mounted to her cheeks. She then smiled, as if at what the carpenter had said, but in reality at the foolish notion that had come into her mind.

"I am glad to get this fence fixed," she said. "It has been an eye-sore to me ever since we arrived. I hope you had no trouble in finding the pickets. Mr. Preston is away from home, else he would have shown you where they were."

"Oh, I had no trouble, madam. The gal there in the kitchen showed me where to find 'em. She's some lass, that."

Nathan again bent and nailed on the picket. It brought back old memories to hear Helen talk, and her voice sounded as sweet as ever. His heart was beating so fast that he believed she could hear it. He longed for her to stay, and yet he wanted her to go away. He could not feel sure of himself in her presence, and his tongue might betray him if he said too much.

"When you get through with this fence I wish you would do some work for me in the house," Mrs. Preston remarked. "Several pantry shelves need repairing, and while you are here it is a good opportunity to get the work done. I hope you will have time."

"Time is nuthin' to me, madam, when it comes to repairin' things. That's my work. I'm allus on the lookout fer a job, watchin' the bend in the road, as the parson said in his sermon."

"So you were in church yesterday, were you?"

"Sure. I allus go. Me an' the parson are good friends. He allus says somethin' worth listenin' to."

"He certainly does, Mr. Stone. That sermon appealed to me very much. I suppose we are all watching the bend in the road, always expecting the golden van to appear, as Mr. Westmore said."

"Seems to me that your golden van has already come round the bend," Nathan replied, as he stooped for another picket. "With sich a fine place as this, another in the city, an' with two sich beautiful little children as these, what more could any woman want? Now, with me it's different. I ain't got wife nor chick, nuthin' 'cept a small bit of land, an' a poor house."

"But you have a big heart, Mr. Stone. Why, we have all heard of the wonderful doll you made for little Doris Watters, and how you rescued the squirrels from the Tooke boys."

"So ye heard about that!" Nathan nearly forgot his drawl in his astonishment.

"Oh, yes. Mattie, our kitchen girl, has been telling Donnie and Ruth all about it. They have made her tell it to them over and over again. That is why they are so interested in you, and look upon you as a hero. When they heard that you were coming to repair this fence, they were delighted. You notice how they are watching your every movement."

"Ye heard also about my scrap with Bill Tooke, I s'pose?" Nathan queried.

"We did, and I hope it will teach him a lesson. But he is an evil-minded man, so may try to seek revenge in some underhanded manner. But, there, I have kept you from your work. It is past breakfast time, and everything will be cold. Come, dears," and she turned to the children, "you may come again and watch Mr. Stone."

As the three walked away toward the house, Nathan bent to his task with renewed energy. He was deeply stirred by this unexpected conversation with the woman he loved, and her concern on his behalf. But it was just like Helen, he well knew. She had not changed in her simplicity of manner and interest in the welfare of those around her. She had always done so since he had first known her. She was always more ready to converse with the humblest rough-clad toilers than with those of wealth and position. Her friends had often bantered her about her fondness for such people.

"I like them," she had always replied. "To me they are all so genuine, different from many I meet in the so-called superior class."

Nathan ate his dinner in the kitchen, and Mattie waited upon him with special attention. He had seen

the girl before, as her home was up the road. She was a good and faithful worker, but her fondness for gossip was well known. Not a thing happened in the neighborhood that Mattie did not know of it, and she spread the news as fast as possible. Her likes and dislikes were intense, so knowing her as they did, most people endeavored to keep in her good graces.

"I'm going to give you a special dinner to-day," she declared, as Nathan took his seat at the table.

"I'm glad to hear that," was the smiling reply. "But why? What have I done to make you give me a special dinner?"

"Because of what you did to Bill Tooke. I hope you broke his jaw when you knocked him down. My! how I wish I had been there when the thing flopped upon the road."

"You evidently don't like Bill."

"Like him! Like that snake? I guess not. I don't know anybody who does. But you must be careful, Mr. Stone. He's a snake, all right, and he'll wait to get back at you. Oh, I know him."

"This is not a lawless country, remember," Nathan replied. "Most likely Bill will think twice before he tries to injure me. But if he does, I am well able to take care of myself."

"Maybe so," and the girl doubtfully shook her head. "Anyway, I advise you to be on your guard."

It took Nathan the whole of the afternoon to repair the fence. It was tedious work, for in some places he had to set in new pieces of scantling. The only time he lost was when he paused to saw some little blocks for Donnie and Ruth. They were delighted with these, and in their eyes the carpenter was a greater man than ever. This was during the early part of

the afternoon. The mother had at length called them, and they went away with her down across the field toward the river.

Nathan had the fence almost finished when they returned. It was nearly six o'clock, and he wished to have supper in his own house. Mrs. Preston stopped to admire the fence, and congratulated Nathan upon his work.

"You will come to-morrow to repair those shelves, will you not?" she asked.

"Yes, madam, I'll be on hand if nuthin' stops me, sich as Bill Tooke, fer instance. One kin never tell jist what's round the bend in the road."

"That's quite true, Mr. Stone. The unexpected always lies ahead. I have been thinking very much about that sermon to-day, and—"

She ceased abruptly as the sound of an approaching auto was heard.

"It's daddy!" Donnie cried. "Come, Ruth, let's go and meet him."

Nathan turned and looked at the car which was now coming up the driveway. He then shot a swift glance at Helen, and noted that the bright, smiling expression had vanished from her face, and in its stead was a look of serious concern. She walked slowly away, and reached the car just as her husband alighted. He spoke to her rather sharply, so Nathan thought, although he could not understand what he said. He paid no attention to the children, but started at once toward Nathan. The latter stooped and began to pick up his tools. His heart was stirred with anger at what he had just beheld. What would not he give could he go home and find Helen awaiting him with two such charming little ones? But Preston seemed to think

nothing of them. He was more interested in the fence than he was in his family.

"Got the fence done?"

Nathan straightened himself up at this question, turned and looked at Preston's coarse, flabby face.

"Yaas, guess she'll do fer a while," he drawled. "She was purty badly busted. Would ye like fer me to give her a coat of paint?"

Preston, however, made no response. He stood staring as if he had seen a ghost. His eyes bulged, and his face twitched. He then emitted a hollow, mirthless laugh, and turned to his wife who was standing by his side.

"Did you hear what this fellow said?" he asked. "He wants to give her a coat of paint," and he motioned to the fence. "I never knew what sex a fence is before. Come on, let's go into the house. I'm almost starved."

Nathan at once picked up his tools and started for home. He knew that Preston had recognized him, and that his laugh and reference to the fence were merely a weak attempt to cover up his confusion. Nathan was deeply annoyed. He felt that the secret would soon be known throughout the entire parish, and he would be placed in a very awkward position.

CHAPTER 6

A Broken Shaft

NATHAN was late getting to sleep that night, as his mind was greatly agitated by the events of the day. He felt certain that Helen was unhappy, and he could not forget how the expression upon her face had suddenly changed upon the arrival of her husband. What was the meaning of it? he asked himself. Was Preston cruel to her? He well knew that the fellow was bad, but he could hardly imagine that he would treat such a woman as his wife in a cruel manner. He knew that Ned had recognized him as Nathan Strong, and he wondered what would be the outcome of it all. Would he tell his wife? And if he did, would her heart be stirred with any tender memories of bygone days?

He was awakened toward morning by the heavy roll of thunder. A storm was sweeping up from the west, and in a few minutes it was directly overhead. It was the heaviest of the season. The crashes were appalling, and the lightning incessant. It was awe-inspiring, but Nathan was not afraid. In fact, he enjoyed the wild tumult that was going on around him. He thought of Preston, and wondered how it was affecting him. He recalled how years before he had seen him tremble violently and his face turn white as death during a thunderstorm in the city. If he had been frightened then, would he not be much more so now? The storm

infused into Nathan's soul a feeling of strength such as he had never experienced before. There was a mighty power back of that thunder and lightning, and upon it he could rely. Surely the One who controlled the heavens would see that justice was meted out to men upon earth. He might delay long, but in the end right would be enthroned. Nathan mused over all this while the thunder crashed, the lightning gleamed, and the rain beat against the window of his room. At length the storm rolled eastward, the rain ceased, and Nathan slept.

When he again awoke the sky was clear, and the bright sun was shining into his room. As he opened the door and stepped outside, a fairy world of beauty and wonder met his eyes. The air was fresh, with every leaf and blade of grass, wet by the rain of night, sparkling beneath the sun's friendly rays. How good to be alive on such a morning, Nathan thought as he stood and looked out upon the river, from which long wisps of mist were slowly rising and disappearing.

It did not take him long to prepare and eat his breakfast. Then when he had washed his few dishes and tidied up the kitchen, he went into his workshop for his kit of tools. He did not like the idea of repairing those shelves since his meeting with Preston the evening before. But he had promised Helen that he would do the work, so he determined to be true to his word.

He had just reached the main highway when an auto sped rapidly up the road, and slowed down close to where he was standing. The driver tossed a letter toward him, and without a word continued on his way. Nathan recognized the car as Preston's and the man as his chauffeur. He picked up the letter from the ground where it had fallen, tore it open and discovered

therein a two-dollar bill. It also contained a slip of paper, signed by Preston, notifying him that his services would be no longer required. That was all, and not one word of explanation. But Nathan needed none. He understood the reason, and he knew, too, that the entire parish would soon be acquainted with the story of his career. A feeling of intense anger welled up in his heart as he again read the letter and looked at the bill. The latter was not the full payment for his day's work; there should have been fifty cents more. But it was just like Ned, and he knew that to collect the balance would cost more than it was worth. That was evidently the way the fellow had worked with small amounts as well as with large. Nathan at first was tempted to tear the bill to pieces, but upon second thought he realised that this would be foolish and childish. The money was his, and if Preston did not wish to pay him the rest, he could keep it.

Slowly he walked back to his workshop and placed the kit of tools upon the bench. He decided not to leave home that day, and as action was necessary, he did some work about the house, such as washing clothes and mopping up the kitchen floor. It was noon by the time he had finished, and after dinner he rested for a while upon the verandah. The mysterious sense of strength which had come to him during the thunderstorm still possessed his soul. And with it there was the feeling of calmness. His every movement during the morning spoke of self-control, and although Preston had been much in his mind he thought of him in a new light. What could the fellow do to harm him? The neighbors had common sense, and would not be easily influenced. Should they learn, as they undoubtedly would, that he was a jail-bird, he had surely

been long enough in their midst to have won their confidence and respect.

That afternoon he made the doll for Peter Martin's little girl, as he had promised. But he did not stop with one, for he made several, of different shapes and sizes. These he dressed with bright material he had purchased the week before at the store. When they were finished, he placed them in a row upon the window-sill back of his work-bench. That evening he went down to the shore and sat upon a log, where he gazed thoughtfully out over the water. He hoped that Helen would take it into her mind to come there again with her little ones. If so, he was determined to speak to her and tell her who he really was, providing that her husband had not done so already. He had thought much about this during the afternoon. She would learn in time, anyway, so what was the use of keeping up the deception any longer? He felt that he could talk to her better freed from his disguise, and perhaps she might unburden her soul to him.

Although he remained on the shore until it was almost dark, Helen did not make her appearance, so slowly he wended his way back to the house. Then it was that he met with his first surprise. It was merely a brief note pinned to the back door informing him that Sam Dobson did not need him to shingle his roof. While Nathan was reading this, a team stopped out upon the road, and a man's voice hailed him.

"Jim Turner says he doesn't want ye to build that woodshed of his," was the message. "He asked me to drop ye word in passin'. Fine evenin', this."

Nathan made no reply, and as the waggon rattled along the road, he gazed after it as immovable as the trees around him. So it had come, but sooner than

he had expected. Preston had wasted no time in spreading the report, and poisoning the minds of his neighbors against him. Others, no doubt, would soon follow the example of the two from whom he had already received word. Preston would like to starve him out, and thus force him to leave the place. But why? Was it because of his love for Helen? What other reason could the fellow have? Helen was Ned's wife, so why should he fear anyone else, no matter how fond the woman might have been of him in the past?

As Nathan brooded over these things while he sat alone that night, he thought of Preston's white, frightened face, and his peculiar manner the previous evening. Then there crept into his mind an idea which had come to him several times before, but which he had always banished as too ridiculous to be entertained for a minute. Was Preston the guilty one in connection with the theft of those bonds? He chided himself for the suspicion, but the more he considered it now, the more likely did it appear. He lighted his pipe and paced rapidly up and down the verandah. He was more agitated than he had been for a long time. Was the guilty one within reach? What could have given Ned so much concern last night but the thought of those stolen bonds, and unexpectedly meeting the man who had been charged with the deed, and who had suffered imprisonment? It did look reasonable, and the more Nathan thought over it, the more certain he became that his suspicion was correct. Then the bitterness of the situation dawned upon him. Who would believe him? Ned Preston was the son of a noted judge, and who would care to listen to the story of a common carpenter, and an ex-convict at that? Where could he get any proof that Preston was the guilty one? Years

had passed, and most people had forgotten all about the affair. What chance would he have after such a length of time to prove his case? The idea of a judge's son being guilty of such an offense would be looked upon as the height of folly by all. Anyway, it gave Nathan considerable satisfaction that he himself had at last arrived at the conclusion as to the guilty one in connection with those stolen bonds. He had something now upon which he could work, so he determined to keep his eyes and ears open as never before.

That Preston had not been slow in spreading the report abroad about Nathan was apparent during the following days. Several people who had asked him to do some work sent word that they did not want him. This placed him in an awkward position. Unless he had something to do he could not live. As it was, he had very little money, for he had spent nearly all he had in buying his land, building and furnishing his house. It did not cost him much to live, but the little money he had on hand would not keep him long. Then there would be the slack winter months when he could not expect to make much, anyway. He might go to the city and obtain work, but he did not wish to do that if he could possibly avoid it.

He was thinking of this one night at the close of the week. No one had spoken to him for days except Peter Martin, who was as friendly as ever, and gave no sign that he had heard anything about his neighbor's career. Nathan had given up his visits to the Watters' house lest he might embarrass the widow should she not wish him to see her little girl. He felt that it was better for him to stay away altogether unless Mrs. Watters should send for him.

It was impossible for Nathan not to feel a keen sense

of bitterness in his heart at the way in which he was being treated. His neighbors called themselves Christian people, and most of them attended the services of their church regularly. The parson, he knew, had often admonished them to be helpful to others, and nearly every Sunday they were reminded in the words of the Litany "to strengthen such as do stand, to comfort and help the weak-hearted, and to raise up them that fall." Yet why should they shun a man, and refuse him work when he was striving to lead a good life, even though he had served a term in the Penitentiary?

Nathan was in the midst of this meditation when a loud knock sounded upon the door. As he opened it, he saw standing before him the towering form of Parson Westmore. He was panting heavily, and was quite agitated.

"I have met with an accident, Mr. Stone," he abruptly explained. "A car crowded me off the road just around the corner. My horse took fright, plunged into the ditch, and broke the right shaft of my waggon. I wonder if you can patch it up?"

"I shall do what I can," Nathan replied, as he accompanied the clergyman to the scene of the mishap. "Whose car was it?"

"Mr. Preston's. He was driving, and Bill Tooke was with him. He evidently didn't see me until I went into the ditch."

"And he didn't stop to see how badly you were damaged?"

"No, he kept right on at a high rate of speed. The roads are becoming unsafe these days with such reckless drivers abroad."

It did not take Nathan long to unfasten the shafts from the waggon, and carry them to his workshop.

The parson followed, leading the horse, which he fastened to a nearby tree.

"The shaft is badly splintered," Nathan declared, "but I can patch it up for to-night. I shall take the measurements and make you a new one to-morrow. It will be ready right after dinner."

He then set to work and did as firm a job as possible, the clergyman watching him most intently.

"It was fortunate that I was near your place," he remarked.

"At the bend in the road," Nathan replied. "That's where the unexpected happens, so you said last Sunday."

"So I did! so I did! and here is the practical application of it."

"And it's not always the golden van, either, is it? Sometimes it is altogether different. Such has been my experience."

"So I believe, Mr. Stone, according to rumors I have lately heard."

"That I am a jail-bird?"

"Yes, yes, but I cannot believe such reports."

"They are true, nevertheless. You might as well know it now as at any time. Ned Preston has been circulating the news, so I surmise."

"It makes no difference to me, let me assure you of that, Mr. Stone. You have proven yourself a quiet and obliging neighbor, and a most earnest worshipper. I wish I had more like you in this parish."

"Others evidently do not think as you do, sir. From the way work has fallen off, it looks as if I might be starved out. Several orders have been cancelled since that news went abroad."

"Is that so?"

"It certainly is. I haven't anything to do now to make a living."

"Dear me! that's too bad. I had no idea that my people would treat you in such a manner. I wonder what I can do about it."

"Do not trouble yourself, Mr. Westmore. I am not starved out yet. Something will come around the bend before long."

When the shaft was repaired, and ere they left the workshop, the clergyman pointed to a rustic chair in a corner of the room.

"Did you make that?" he inquired. "It is a very fine one."

"Yes, I made it some time ago when I had nothing else to do. I learned to make such things when at the Penitentiary. Would you like to have it?"

"Indeed I should. But what is the price? Perhaps it is more than I can afford."

"It will cost you nothing," Nathan assured him, as he picked up the chair and carried it outside. "It is no good to me, so I shall be delighted if you can make some use of it."

The parson protested, and offered to pay for the chair, but Nathan had his way, and tied it securely to the back of the waggon. Soon the shafts were in place, the horse hitched up, and the parson in his seat with the reins in his hands.

"I shall not soon forget your kindness, Mr. Stone," he said. "I shall pay you for your work when I come to-morrow. Keep up courage and do not worry. Perhaps the golden van will come around the bend sooner than you imagine."

"You may be right, sir," Nathan laughingly replied. "But what about the roots and snags which have to be

torn up at times? You mentioned such things in your sermon, didn't you?"

"Quite true, quite true. Yes, there are snags in the way, and one doesn't have to go far to find them. Get along, Jerry. Good-night, Mr. Stone, I hope to see you again to-morrow."

CHAPTER 7

Through the Window

AS Nathan worked at the waggon shaft the next morning he wondered what Ned Preston and Bill Tooke had been doing together. That they had been bent upon some mischief he felt certain. It was most unusual for the two men to be so friendly. But, perhaps, their mutual hatred to him was the cause of it. Anyway, he would await their move, whatever that might be.

Parson Westmore came that afternoon for the new shaft, and while Nathan was removing the broken one, the clergyman sat watching nearby.

"I believe I have found work for you, Mr. Stone," he at length announced.

"That's good news," was the reply. "Have any of the neighbors repented?"

"Not that I know of. But this is a different kind of work, and that rustic chair you gave me last night was the cause of it. When I reached home with my prize, I found several friends there. They have cottages at River View where they are spending the summer. They were most enthusiastic over the chair, and I have taken orders for a number, providing you will make them. They asked what they would cost, and although I did not know for sure, I told them that they should be worth five dollars each, at least. They considered that reasonable, so if you are willing you can

make three at once. I feel certain that others will want chairs as well, so you may work up quite a business."

Nathan was much touched by the clergyman's interest on his behalf.

"It is very good of you, Mr. Westmore," he replied. "I never thought of the idea before. River View is a busy place, I understand, so there should be a good sale for the chairs. I can make other things, too, such as flower-stands and tables. If I had a rowboat, I could take them there myself."

"You are welcome to mine, Mr. Stone. It has been seldom used since my son left home. It may leak quite a bit, so will need some caulking. You can get it whenever you are ready."

Nathan was greatly pleased at the idea, and a new spirit animated his soul as he thought of the prospects in store. He knew where he could find plenty of suitable wood, and he really enjoyed making rustic chairs and tables. He set earnestly to work, and various were the designs he made, giving his imagination free play, feeling certain that those who bought his wares would be satisfied.

The middle of the following week he took his first load to River View. He had caulked the parson's boat, and had given it a much-needed coat of paint, thus making it quite water-tight. His bulky outfit almost filled the boat, and besides the chairs and tables he took along with him the dolls he had made. It was a row of about six miles, but he enjoyed the trip. It was a beautiful morning, and the river was as smooth as glass. The people at the summer resort were in good humor, eagerly bought his entire stock, and ordered more. Parents purchased the dolls for their children, and several little ones were keenly disappointed at not

obtaining any. But Nathan promised to bring more the next time, so they were comforted.

This success was most encouraging, and once more Nathan set to work upon a new supply. Only Peter Martin visited him, bringing fresh eggs and butter. Each time he stayed for a while, chatted, and watched the carpenter at his work.

"Ye learned that business well, Mr. Stone," he one evening remarked. "I wish t'goodness I could make sich things. I'm not much use on the farm these days, as I'm gittin' lamer all the time. My knee hurts me a great deal now. Yer fortunate in bein' so handy.

"But I paid dear for it, Mr. Martin," Nathan reminded, looking up from his work. "While I was learning to make chairs and such things I might have become a successful business man."

"So I understand, Mr. Stone, from what I have heard of late. But d'ye s'pose ye'd have been any happier than ye are now?"

"Perhaps not, although I'm very sorry that I didn't have a chance to try it out. You have heard the story of my career, no doubt, so it is not necessary for me to tell you about it. But a block of twelve years ruined in a man's life, just when he is in his prime, is a very serious matter."

"It sure is, an' no mistake about that. But success an' money don't allus bring happiness, remember. Look at Mr. Preston, fer instance. He's got money, an' is considered a smart business man. But is he happy? I should say not, from what I hear. Mattie Burns, the girl who works at his house in the summer time, has told my wife some things I wouldn't like to repeat. I guess Mrs. Preston has her own troubles."

"Mr. Preston should be happy, though, with such a wife and children as he has," Nathan replied.

"He'll never be happy with sich a conscience as he carries around. I don't see how he kin sleep at night after the mean, contemptible things that he has done. There's my leg, fer instance, an' the good money I had to pay out because of his diviltry. But, never mind, he'll git what's comin' to him some day, an' mebbe it'll all come in a bunch. It ginerally does when it starts, so I've noticed."

Peter rose slowly from the box upon which he had been sitting, and limped toward the door.

"There's a storm not fer off," he announced, as he opened the door and viewed the sky. "Rain's needed, an' we havent had any since that last thunderstorm."

"I hope it won't come to-morrow," Nathan replied. "I have another load almost ready to take to River View."

"Better be careful, Mr. Stone. It's mighty rough at times out there on the water. That flat-bottom boat of the parson's is hard to handle, 'specially with an outfit sich as you'll have. But good-night, an' good luck to ye."

The next day Nathan found that Peter's words were only too true. He started that afternoon for River View, and when halfway there the wind came up from the south. It had been threatening all the morning, but as the water was smooth, Nathan thought that he could reach his destination before it arrived. Now he knew that he had been mistaken. The wind steadily increased, and this, together with the mounting waves, made rowing very difficult. Often the spray dashed high, wetting his clothes and his load. It was a hard pull, and once he believed that he would have to give

up and go back home. But he kept on, and at length, greatly wearied, he reached the summer resort. It did not take him long to dispose of his goods, and he then longed to return home. But he did not care to venture forth with the water so rough, so he waited, hoping that the wind would die down. Instead, however, it increased, until about dark it was blowing a gale, and ere long the rain began to fall. He, accordingly, abandoned the idea of returning by boat, and decided to walk. He could come back next day for the craft, or as soon as the storm ceased.

There was a large hotel at River View, and as Nathan was hungry, he entered the building and took a seat in a corner of the comfortable dining-room. To sit at a table covered with spotless linen, to be waited upon, and to eat food not of his own cooking, was a luxurious experience for him. He recalled how often he had frequented hotels and restaurants before his imprisonment, and had taken it all as a matter of course. But now it was different, and the novelty appealed to him. He watched with much interest the people seated at the various tables, noted their animated faces, and listened to their talk. Several consisted of family groups, fathers, mothers and children. How happy they must be in one another's company, he thought. Perhaps he, too, would be enoying such a life but for the strange twist of fate that had overtaken him. Helen would be just where a beautiful woman was sitting by the side of her two radiant daughters, talking to her husband. A feeling of intense loneliness, mingled with bitterness, stole into his heart. What had he done to be deprived of the woman he loved, and all those things that make life worth living?

Happening to glance to the right, he gave a start as

he saw Ned Preston enter the room, and with him was a woman of more than ordinary beauty of face and form. They took seats at a small table, and Nathan was glad that Preston's back was toward him. He did not wish the fellow to know that he was there, so from his corner he could watch them without attracting any notice. The man and the woman nearby also saw them. A look of deep significance passed between them, and the woman said something which Nathan could not catch. The two girls also looked around, and then whispered earnestly together. How Nathan longed to know what they were saying. That it was not of a very complimentary nature he felt certain. What kind of a life was Preston leading? he wondered. Was he in the habit of leaving his wife and paying attention to other women? It did appear so, and the thought stirred him to anger. Had Preston's wife been anyone else but Helen it would not have concerned him in the least. But to think that the one woman in the whole world who was dearer to him than life was the wife of the man before him, and he was tired of her, and was basking in the graces of another, was hard to endure. Nathan's hands clenched hard, and his eyes glowed with indignation as he thought of these things. He noticed that Preston was talking earnestly to the woman seated opposite him, and that she was looking with beaming eyes into his. This made Nathan more disgusted than ever. He rose from the table, made his way out of the room, paid for his unfinished meal, and left the building. It was raining hard, and the wind was blowing a gale. But he paid no attention to the weather. He wanted to get as far away from River View as possible, and so he at once set his face homeward. He walked with a rapid

stride, in keeping with the tumult that was raging in his brain. His clothes soon became thoroughly soaked, but he did not mind. In fact, he never thought about them.

Darkness came upon him when he was about halfway home, and walking was difficult. Several times he was forced into the ditch by autos, and liberally splashed with mud and water. But steadily he kept on his way, and at length stopped in front of the Preston house. Light streamed from two front windows, and a desire entered his heart to know how Helen was spending the evening. Acting upon the impulse of the moment, he walked slowly up the driveway, and paused just at the edge of the large verandah, close by a group of thick lilac bushes. From here he could look into the sitting-room through the windows where the curtains were partly drawn aside. And there he saw Helen sitting near a little table, with the light from a shaded lamp falling upon her face and hair. A wood fire was burning in the grate, and at this the woman was gazing. He could obtain only a side view of her face, but from her serious expression he surmised that she was in deep thought. Her hands were clasped in her lap, and her head was bent somewhat forward. Nathan knew that it was unmanly for him to be standing watching her, and he was about to hurry away, when the woman rose suddenly to her feet and walked rapidly up and down the room. This she did several times, and the watcher was thus enabled to see her face to a good advantage. And what he saw there startled him, for it was the face of a woman in the depths of despair. Once she paused, clasped her hands wildly together, and her body trembled. An intense longing swept upon Nathan to rush into the house, seize her in his arms

and comfort her. He realised, however, that such a thing would be madness, so he crushed back the desire that was burning in his heart, turned and fled away, lest he should be tempted to follow his wild impulse. But he had seen enough to know that the rumors he had heard concerning Helen Preston were true. She was most unhappy, and it was due to the man she had married. She evidently knew the kind of life he was leading, so while he was spending his nights with other women she was left alone in solitude and despair.

CHAPTER 8

A Startling Confession

WHEN Nathan reached home he built a fire in the stove, changed his clothes, and hung the wet ones up to dry. The heat felt good, and the room seemed exceptionally cosy and comfortable after his battling with the storm. He lighted his pipe, stretched himself upon the cot near the stove, and gave himself up to the enjoyment of a much-needed rest. The rain drove lashingly against the window facing south, and he could hear the wind tearing through the trees at the back of the house. It was good to be under shelter on such a night, and but for the thought of Helen alone in her distress he would have felt quite happy.

A loud rap outside startled him, and when he had thrown open the door, he saw Peter Martin, dripping with wet, standing before him. In his hand he held a piece of paper which he at once gave to Nathan.

"It's a phone message from the city," he explained. "I happened to be at the store when the call came fer you. I told Dobbins that you were away from home, an' that he'd better git the message, an' I would deliver it, so there it is."

"Come in, Mr. Martin," Nathan invited. "It is nice and comfortable in here."

"Can't stay a minute, Mr. Stone, though I'm much obliged, all the same. My horse is jist outside."

"Thanks very much for your kindness, Mr. Martin. You should not be out in such a storm as this."

"That's quite true, but us farmers have to turn out in all kinds of weather. We're used to it. Good-night."

When Peter had gone, Nathan carried the piece of paper to the light, and with difficulty read the scrawl written with a lead pencil.

"DEAR MR. STONE:

"You are wanted at the city early to-morrow morning at the office of Black & Muirhead, lawyers, 61 Crescent Street. It is a matter of great importance, and your presence is urgently desired. I have taken this message for you.

"J. E. DOBBINS."

Nathan stared at these words, read and re-read them. What does it mean? he asked himself. What could the lawyers want with him? Had it anything to do with those stolen bonds? The thought made his heart beat fast, while an expression of hope dawned in his eyes. But such an idea was ridiculous, he felt certain, and he chided himself for his foolishness. "A matter of great importance," so the message said. There were only two matters of great importance to him in life, and one was the unravelling of the mystery connected with those stolen bonds. The other was his love for Helen. This could not have anything to do with her, so, therefore, it must be something about those bonds.

Nathan slept but little that night. He had much to keep him awake, for when not thinking about the message he had received, Helen was in his mind. He

was up early, and at the wharf some time before the little steamer arrived. Never was the boat so late, he thought, and never did it take her so long to reach the city. When at length the trip was ended, he sprang ashore, hurried up the street, and in a few minutes he was on board a car, headed for the business heart of the city. He had no difficulty in finding the office of Black & Muirhead, where he at once met Mr. Black, the senior partner, and stated who he was. The lawyer greeted him in a most friendly manner, shaking hands with him, and offering him a chair.

"I was afraid you would not get here in time," he remarked, as he picked up a folded paper from a number of neatly-arranged documents on his desk. "But now we can get right ahead with the business."

"What is the matter of great importance, anyway?" Nathan asked. "I am completely in the dark as to why you sent for me in such a hurry."

"I cannot explain to you just now, Mr. Stone, but you will understand shortly. A client of mine is anxiously awaiting you, so we shall go to him right away."

Thrusting the paper he was holding in his hand into an inside pocket, and taking down his hat from a hook, the lawyer left the office, with Nathan wonderingly following. Outside there was an auto standing, and in another minute Mr. Black was at the wheel and was threading his way through the crowded streets, headed for the main residential portion of the city. At length they came to a beautiful avenue lined with stately trees, where large residences lifted their imposing fronts, and well-kept lawns gladdened the eyes of all who passed that way. Along this they sped, and stopped at last before a house more magnificent in appearance than any they had yet seen. Here they alighted, and Mr.

Black at once led the way up the smooth concrete walk, and rang the bell. A maid opened the door, and as the men entered, she conducted them up the richly-carpeted stairs, and ushered them into a room on the right. Nathan gave a slight start of surprise as his eyes rested upon a man lying upon a bed, his face white and haggard. Bright, restless eyes watched the lawyer as he drew near, and a skeleton hand motioned the attendant nurse to leave the room.

"Has he come?" the sick man eagerly asked. "Is that Nathan Strong?"

At these words Nathan stepped quickly forward, for in the invalid he recognized his former co-worker, Matthew Halton.

"Yes, he is the man," the lawyer replied. "But keep calm, Mr. Halton, as you will need all of your strength for this interview."

"You are right, Black. "But give Mr. Strong a chair, here close to my side. Ah, that's better," he continued, when the lawyer had complied with his request.

For a full minute the invalid kept his eyes fixed upon Nathan's face with a mute appeal, such as an animal sometimes exhibits when in deep distress. Several times he moistened his parched lips with his tongue and attempted to speak. Nathan could hardly believe that this was the man of abounding health he had known years before. He knew that Matthew Halton had succeeded in life, and from a humble office worker had rapidly risen to be one of the city's most prominent business men. The praise of him was upon the lips of all, and his outstanding career was held up as a worthy example to the young. He was always foremost in every good work, and his liberality was well known.

He had been untiring on behalf of his city's welfare until disease laid him low. General regret had been expressed at his illness, and for weeks the newspapers had been issuing daily statements as to his condition. Nathan had always read these with more than ordinary interest, owing to his acquaintance with the man in former years.

"Have you brought the paper for me to sign?" Halton asked the lawyer.

"Yes, sir, it is right here. Are you ready?"

"Just a minute, Black," and the invalid lifted his right hand as he spoke. "I have something to say to Mr. Strong."

He then turned to the man seated by his side.

"Have you any idea why I sent for you, Strong?" he asked.

"I am beginning to suspect something now," was the reply.

"Ah, is that so? My! we had trouble in locating you. I was sure that I would die without seeing you."

"And how did you find me?" Nathan asked, as Halton again paused to moisten his lips.

"It was through Ned Preston. He told me where you were living."

"Did he?" Nathan's hands clenched hard, while an angry gleam flashed in his eyes.

"Yes, and I sent for you as soon as I found out."

"And what do you want?" Nathan peremptorily demanded. "I am here, so I would like to know what is the meaning of all this."

"You are here to listen to the confession of a dying man. "Oh, Strong, I have been living in hell for years, with no rest of mind day nor night."

"Hell, then, must be a different kind of place from

what I have always been taught," Nathan sarcastically replied, as he glanced around the luxuriously-furnished room." You have evidently thrived during your period of torment."

"I have, indeed, but at what a price! It was the price of manhood and peace of soul. Oh, how I have suffered!"

"And you were not the only one, remember."

"What! Do you know? Do you understand what I mean?"

"I think I do."

"That I stole those bonds?"

At this confession Nathan rose to his feet, and towered above the bed. Outwardly he was calm, but a tumult was raging in his heart. A longing swept upon him to seize the wasted man lying before him, and bestow upon him the punishment he deserved. Halton seemed to read something of this in his manner and his eyes dilated with fear. He shrank back and pulled up the bedclothes as if for protection. Nathan noted this, and a sense of pity smote him for the miserable creature cowering before him.

"I won't harm you," he said. "Why should I add more misery to you than that you have already endured. I guess the Lord has dealt with you according to your deserving."

"He has! He has! But why am I so terribly punished while he who led me into guilt has perfect health, and has not been hounded in conscience?"

"And who is that?" Nathan sharply demanded.

"Don't you know?"

"I think I do, but I wish to hear it from your own lips."

"It was Ned Preston, the villain. Did you suspect him?"

"I did."

Nathan rasped forth these words, and there was something in the tone of his voice that sent a chill of apprehension through the listening lawyer. As he watched the cruelly-wronged man before him, he did not envy Preston's success and ill-gotten gains.

"Yes, it was Ned who plotted the whole affair," Halton explained. "He was rooming with you, so it was easy for him to place several of those stolen bonds in one of your grips. He led me into it, for both of us were badly in need of money. No one ever suspected us, and when we prospered, people believed that our success was due entirely to our own keen business talents. But everything we own was built upon those bonds we stole. Why, whatever we touched after that turned into gold. We were Fortune's favorites, and we had all that the heart could desire."

"Except peace," Nathan drily remarked.

"Ah, you are right so far as I am concerned. The more I prospered, the more peace fled from me. I have this beautiful house, but it is not a home. I married a woman and lavished my wealth upon her. But she left me, and my two children went with her. I disowned them, and have lived alone in this house which is nothing but a prison, attended by my servants who care for me because I pay them well. I have bestowed gifts without stint, and have thrown myself into the welfare of this city. But all in vain. Peace is as far from me as ever. 'There is no peace to the wicked,' so the Bible says, and I know only too well how true are those words."

"Do you see Ned Preston often?" Nathan asked. "His conscience doesn't seem to be troubling him."

"I see Ned only occasionally, though that is too often. But he is not happy. I know that from what I have seen and heard. He is living a fast life of shame, and he has given himself up almost entirely to drink and bad women. It is terrible!"

Halton ceased, and began to cough violently. The excitement was telling upon him, and he was weakening fast.

"Perhaps you had better not talk any more to-day," the lawyer suggested. "The strain is too great."

"I must talk," the invalid vehemently declared. "I must unburden my soul, and tell of the things that have lain hidden there for years. I have been in hell, and to talk to some one is a little relief."

"I see that a man may be a prisoner, though not confined by bars and locks," Nathan remarked. "I suffered years in the Penitentiary, but you have been in a worse prison."

"You are right. You were an innocent man, and your conscience was clear. But I—oh, God!"

Halton lay panting for breath, and his cough again swept upon him. A hectic flush tinged his cheeks, and his eyes were unusually bright. The lawyer nervously fumbled the paper he was holding in his hand, and when the cough had ceased, he moved closer to the invalid.

"Suppose you sign this paper now, Mr. Halton," he again suggested. "It is very important, you know, and should, ah—anything happen to you, justice might not be done to Mr. Strong."

"You are right, Black. Give me a pen and I shall

sign at once. But, stay, read it once more that I may be sure it is complete."

The lawyer did so and in a low, clear voice read the confession of Matthew Halton, implicating himself and Edward Preston, and fully exonerating Nathan Strong. There were not many words, but they were sufficient, and as Nathan listened, a thrill of joy surged through his being. At last his name was clear, and all would acknowledge him as an innocent man who had been shamefully treated. He beheld almost as in a dream the lawyer going to summon the nurse and one of the household servants to witness the signing of the confession. He saw them enter, watched Halton write his name and the witnesses theirs. Then when the lawyer had added his signature, and attached several seals, Nathan drew a great sigh of relief.

"That is yours," he heard Mr. Black say, as he handed him the paper. "For your sake I am thankful for this day's work. Allow me to congratulate you."

Nathan seized the outstretched hand, and a mistiness dimmed his eyes.

"Thank you," he replied, and his voice was somewhat unsteady. "It is hard for me to realise the truth of all this. I must get out into the fresh air that I might think it all over. I hope it isn't only a dream."

He was moving toward the door, when a feeble cry from Halton caused him to stop and look around. The invalid was trying to rise, but as Nathan stepped swiftly to his side, he fell back again upon the pillow. The wretched man caught Nathan's right hand in his, and held it fast.

"Will you forgive me?" he asked. "I don't want to go until I hear the words from your own lips."

Nathan hesitated, and tried to free his hand. How

could he forgive the man who had so deeply wronged him? But Halton would not let him go.

"For God's sake! Don't deny a dying man's last request," he pleaded. "You will, won't you?"

"Yes, I forgive you," was the somewhat reluctant reply. "But I can't forgive Ned Preston. You will soon have to answer to your Maker, but Ned will have to answer to me. Good-by."

Without another word, he withdrew his hand, and strode rapidly out of the room.

CHAPTER 9

The Struggle

THE little steamer *Banner* was making her regular evening run up river, and she carried a fair-sized cargo. Farmers, and others, were congregated on the lower deck, assembled in little groups, discussing various topics of interest. Nathan sat alone upon an empty crate, clutching in his hands a copy of the evening paper he had obtained before coming on board. He paid no attention to what was taking place around him, for his mind was centered upon an article telling of the death that day of Matthew Halton, the prominent citizen. It was a most laudatory account, setting forth Halton's successful business career, his outstanding integrity, his numerous gifts, and his deeds of charity.

"Some men build upon the defeat and ruin of others," so ran the article. "Some hoard their ill-gotten gains, or squander them in purely selfish interest. Some never think of others, and are of little use to their community. But with Matthew Halton it was different. Whatever he possessed was due to integrity of character, and honest business methods. In the path of his success he left no wrecks behind, and no man was the poorer because he lived. Men and women in all stations of life found in him an ever-ready and sympathetic helper. He turned a deaf ear to none, and because of his great heart and open hand thousands to-day will mourn their loss."

Nathan read no more, and the paper dropped upon his lap. His eyes stared straight before him out upon the river. So Halton had died just an hour after he had signed the paper, he mused. He thrust his right hand into an inside pocket of his coat to make sure that the document was safe. It was the most precious thing he possessed, and he trembled at the thought of losing it. What would people say when the truth concerning Halton became known? he wondered. And the newspaper which had said such laudatory things, would it remain silent? Would it give as prominent a space to the injustice done to Nathan Strong as it did to the death of Matthew Halton? He had his doubts. Anyway, he was determined that he would soon give it a chance. And what about Ned Preston? When the exposure came, what would be said of him and his contemptible deed?

Since leaving Halton's house Nathan's heart had been on fire with a desire for speedy revenge. He had wandered aimlessly about the city, except when he was standing watching Preston's office situated in the main business section. He longed to go to the villain and tell him what he had learned. But he resisted the temptation, deciding to go home first that he might brood upon it, and silently triumph for a time over the victim soon to be in his clutch. No longer was he the carpenter, content with his humble tasks of building and repairing. The beast within him was aroused, and revenge was his one desire. He rejoiced in this feeling. He had often experienced it during the years of his imprisonment when he had beaten with his hands against the walls of his cell, and passed sleepless nights in wild impotent rage. But that had all passed forever, so he believed, and he had come forth from his bondage

a new man, clothed with the majesty of self-mastery. Little did he really know of the strange depths of the human heart when face to face with an overmastering impulse or a strong temptation.

And through the memory of his sufferings came the thought of his parents. Although he knew that they had always believed him to be innocent, yet he was certain that his imprisonment had shortened their lives. It was bitter to think that two such worthy people had been enforced to endure such agony of soul and mind owing to the misdeeds of others. Oh, if they were only alive to hear the proof of their son's innocency!

So vehement was his emotion as he thought of them, that he rose abruptly to his feet and walked over to the port side of the boat. He looked out upon the water through the steadily deepening darkness. Some things he could do, such as hale Ned Preston to justice, but to bring back his parents and give them comfort in their old age was beyond his power. His attention was suddenly arrested by voices close at hand. He glanced around, and saw several men standing near, one of them holding a newspaper in his hand.

"Yes, Matt. Halton was a good man," he was saying. "I worked fer him once, an' he treated me white."

"Pity there ain't more like him," another replied. "Now, there's Ned Preston, fer instance. He's a shyster, if ever there was one. Why, he owns houses in the city that ain't fit fer pigs to live in. People have to take 'em because houses are so scarce. He charges big rents, too, an' if a man can't pay on the dot, out he goes bag an' baggage, right on the street. He has turned people out in the dead of winter when they had no places to go to. An' look at Preston with his fine house in the city an' another in the country."

"It's a wonder the law doesn't step in an' make him fix up his houses," one of the men remarked.

"Law!" was the contemptuous retort. "The less said about law the better when it comes to the rights of tenants."

The conversation drifted off to politics in which Nathan was not interested. But he had heard enough to give him food for serious thought. So Preston was grinding down the poor in the city, was he? Owned houses which were not fit for pigs to live in, while he built the finest for himself. But that would soon be changed, and Ned would occupy a cell in the Penitentiary. He would then be in his right place, and he would stay there, too, for a long time.

It was dark when the *Banner* reached River View. Here Nathan landed and went at once to his boat which was drawn well up on the shore. In a few minutes he was headed homeward, pulling steadily at the oars. It was a beautiful night and hardly a ripple ruffled the surface of the water. Sounds along the shore could be clearly heard, the laughter of children, the barking of dogs, and the raucous honks of auto horns. Nathan paid little heed to these, for his mind was too deeply occupied with the strange events of the day. But when he came opposite the Preston house he rested upon his oars, and allowed the boat to drift with the tide which was setting up. A light streamed from a window in the front of the house on the hill, and Nathan pictured Helen sitting alone in the room as he had seen her that night of the storm.

Silently he dipped his oars into the water and urged the boat shoreward. Some unseen force seemed to be drawing him against which he had no power of control. A disturbing idea had come into his mind which

was now battling fiercely with the raging spirit of revenge. If he should expose Ned Preston and bring him to justice, how would it affect Helen? He knew the sensitiveness of her nature, and how could she stand up under the ordeal? Would she be able to bear the disgrace and agony of mind which would surely be hers when she learned that her husband was a criminal? He believed that her heart would be broken, and that she would never again hold up her head and face the world. And it all rested with him. Nathan's hands gripped hard upon the oars, and his firm-set teeth told of the struggle that was going on within. Preston must be punished, but he would not suffer alone. He would drag down innocent ones with him. That Helen would be one of them was almost too terrible for Nathan to contemplate.

He had gone but a short distance when he again ceased rowing. A woman was singing in close to the shore, and her voice floated sweetly through the night out over the placid water. Nathan's heart beat fast, for he was certain that it was Helen's voice he heard. It could be no other, and he recognized the tune and the words she was singing.

"Somewhere the sun is shining,
Somewhere the song birds dwell;
Hush then thy sad repining,
God lives, and all is well.
Somewhere, Somewhere,
Beautiful Isle of Somewhere,
Land of the true where we live anew,
Beautiful Isle of Somewhere."

Nathan listened spellbound. It had been long years since he had heard that voice lifted up on the wings of song. It had always thrilled him in the past, but never

so much as now. The calmness of the night and his own agitated state of mind, perhaps, had much to do with enhancing the effect. He also detected a deep note of pathos in Helen's voice which had not been there before, and he believed that he knew the cause. And he was about to increase her sorrow, and to add another overwhelming burden to her life!

Impulsively he swung the boat around, and rowed homeward with great strong strokes. He had almost given way to the desire to go to Helen and comfort her. He had to get away from the place of his temptation and that sweet plaintive voice which was affecting him so keenly. No matter how much Helen meant to him, he was not going to allow his love to interfere with his bringing her husband to justice. Of that he was determined. He would not play the weak, sentimental fool, and thus allow a villain to go free. Helen could never belong to him, anyway, and he had his own life to live and his name to clear. Helen had married Preston, and surely she had known what such a union would mean. And although she had suffered at his hands, most likely she would stand by him to the last, and repudiate with scorn and contempt the one who was instrumental in bringing him to justice. Women had done so in the past, and most likely Helen would do the same now.

Such were some of Nathan's thoughts as he drove the boat through the water straight for his own landing-place. He pulled the craft well up on the shore, and walked slowly up the path toward his house. He made a mere pretence at eating the supper he prepared that night, for all the time he was waging the greatest battle of his life. He could not remain still, as he had to be on the move to keep pace with his active mind.

For some time he strode up and down the gravel walk outside the house. He summoned to his aid all the weapons in the arsenal of revenge, and when he at length went back into the house, he brought down his Bible and read over several Psalms of cursing and judgment. He knew them by heart, for he had often repeated them during the first years of his imprisonment. But now he wanted to look at the words themselves upon the printed page. He gloated over the pictures they brought to his mind. He recalled the terrible injustice that had been meted out to him, his disgrace, the ruin of his life's hopes, the loss of Helen, and the winning of her by Preston. But when his mind turned to his parents and all that they had endured, his anger grew more intense. He thought of their grave, patient faces, and how they had gone silently about their daily tasks with the image of their only son undergoing the bonds of imprisonment. With a great cry as of a wounded animal, he hit furiously out at an unseen enemy. He would be avenged. But how? Could he depend upon the law to give him justice? This unspoken question startled him. How had the law served him in the past? Could he expect any different treatment now? Ned Preston was a judge's son, and although the evidence would be all against him, he would have money to back him up, and who could tell what influences might be brought to bear upon the case, and he might go unpunished. Anyway, the affair would be long drawn out, due to many postponements. No, that would not do. Preston must be punished at once, and most effectively, at that. Nathan determined to take the matter into his own hands. He would defy the law which had treated him so cruelly, and after he had wreaked his revenge upon Preston, it could do with

him as it wished. Nothing would much matter to him after that. The law could put him to death, if it so desired. There was nothing for him to live for, anyway, and no one would grieve for him.

For a few minutes he stood like a statue in the middle of the room. He then seized his hat, blew out the light, tore open the door and sprang out into the darkness.

CHAPTER 10

The Fugitive

NATHAN hurried down the road with a strong, rapid stride. The spirit of the cave man possessed him. He had been deeply wronged, and he would pay back in full the injury that had been done. The blood surged madly through his body, and his brain throbbed. Forgotten was all feeling of mercy, and forgiveness was a thing of naught. Even his love for Helen was unable to restrain his wild ungovernable passion. Like a raging torrent it was ready to sweep all before it, the innocent and guilty alike.

He had gone several hundred yards when a peculiar sound arrested him, and stayed his hurrying feet. It came from the right, just ahead. He listened intently, but hearing nothing more, he was about to resume his journey, when he heard it again. It was like the low moan of some creature in distress. He took a few steps forward, and peered keenly through the darkness. But he could see nothing. Only the sounds were more frequent now, and he felt sure that they came from a human being. It was a still night, so striking a match, he searched the side of the road, and ere the feeble flame had flickered out, he saw an object lying huddled in the ditch. That it was some one in distress he was well aware, so he advanced, struck another match, and beheld the form of a man lying at

his feet. He spoke, but received no reply. The moaning alone continued, at times scarcely audible.

Nathan was in a quandary. He was anxious to get on his way, and yet he could not leave the unconscious man there. Something had to be done, and all that he could do was to get him back to his house. He reached down, laid his right hand upon the man's shoulder, and gave him a slight shake.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded. "Are you sick or drunk?"

This had the desired effect upon the prostrate man. He moved and tried to scramble to his feet.

"Don't take me back!" he feebly moaned. "Let me go! For God's sake, don't take me there again!"

"Shut up," Nathan sternly ordered. "Are you drunk? If you are, then I'll leave you and get on my way."

This brought the bewildered man somewhat to his senses, and he clutched frantically at his rescuer.

"Don't leave me!" he pleaded. "I'm not drunk, only dead beat, and starving. I thought you were—"

He ceased abruptly, and his clutch relaxed.

"You're not going to take me back, are you?" he asked. "You're not going to put me in that hole again? I must see my wife and child first."

"No, I am not going to take you back," Nathan assured, thinking that the man was wandering in his mind. "Come, buck up. I'm going to take you to my house and give you something to eat. Get up, and I'll help you."

Slowly the man rose to his feet, and as Nathan took him by the arm he noticed that he was tottering and trembling violently.

"I can't walk," the stranger moaned. "I'm too weak. Let me stay here and die."

"Nonsense," Nathan chided. "I'm going to take you home, if I have to carry you every step of the way. But I guess you can walk, all right, with my assistance. Come on."

Thus encouraged, the man allowed Nathan to help him out of the ditch and to guide him slowly along the road. At times he would have fallen but for the strong arm supporting him. Twice Nathan believed that he would be forced to lift him bodily and carry him the rest of the way. He spoke encouragingly, and he could tell that the man was bravely exerting every ounce of strength to stand upright. At length the house was reached and the exhausted man placed upon the cot in the kitchen. Nathan at once lighted the lamp, and as the gleam fell upon the stranger's face, he gave a start of surprise. He recognized him, and knew very well where he had seen him before. He also understood the meaning of the strange words he had uttered down the road. He said nothing, however, although his hands trembled slightly as he started a fire in the stove, and poured some water into the kettle. Several times he glanced toward the cot, and noticed that the visitor was lying very still with his eyes closed. With as little noise as possible, Nathan prepared a simple meal, and when the tea was made he aroused the sleeper.

"If you're hungry, now's your chance," he said. "Perhaps you will feel stronger after you have eaten something."

The man lifted himself slowly from the cot, and dragged his weary form to the table. His hands clawed at the food, and he ate more like a ravenous beast

than a human being. Nathan, watching, felt a deep sympathy for the unfortunate fellow, although for a while he said nothing. When at last the man's appetite was appeased, he drew his chair a little closer and laid a hand upon the man's arm.

"When did you get out?" he asked.

Startled and amazed, the visitor shrank back from the touch, and rose unsteadily to his feet.

"W—why do you ask that?" he demanded. "What do you mean?"

"Come, come, I know who you are, so it's no use trying to put up a bluff. You are Henry Stairs, No. 421, sentenced to five years in the Pen."

"Lord!" The man's unshaven jaws worked convulsively as he tried to remonstrate.

"It's no use, old man, so quit it."

"But how do you know me?" Stairs gasped.

"Because I was there when you entered."

"You were! And who are you? I can't recall your face."

"Not likely," and a smile spread over Nathan's face. "This beard makes a fairly good disguise. But don't you remember No. 737?"

"Ah, yes, I do," and Stairs' face brightened a bit, and he gave a sigh of relief. "I was scared almost out of my senses when you asked me when I got out of the Pen. But you won't send me back, will you?"

Nathan's only reply was to motion the man over to the cot.

"Do you smoke?" he asked.

Eagerly Stairs reached out and grasped the well-filled pipe which was offered him, and when it was lighted, he leaned back and drew long, deliberate puffs.

"My! that's a treat," he commented. "It puts new life into me."

After Nathan had placed more wood in the stove, he sat down by the cot.

"Now, explain why you are here," he began. "Tell me the truth."

"I escaped with two others from the Penitentiary," Stairs confessed in a low voice. "But, say, you won't send me back, will you?"

"That was a foolish thing to say," Nathan replied, ignoring the question. "How much longer did you have to serve?"

"One year."

"Only one year! Why, man, you must have been crazy. You are sure to be caught, and then you will be given a further sentence."

"Oh, I am afraid so, and that's what's troubling me. But the chance came, and I could not resist the temptation. I did so want to see my wife and child."

"So you were on your way to them when I found you?"

"Yes. I was dead beat, and almost starved. I was afraid to ask for grub from any of the houses for fear they might spot me."

"Why were you put in the Pen?"

"Because I stole food for my starving wife and child. I could not get work, so I was driven almost to despair. But if they had only given me another chance I would have paid for all I took. But I had no one to speak for me, and so was convicted."

"And what has become of your wife and child?"

"My wife has been doing some housework by the day. Oh, my heart is almost broken to think that she has to do it! If they had only given me one more

chance and allowed me to work, I would have made good."

The man's face hardened, and his eyes glowed with an angry light. Nathan asked no further questions just then, but remained in deep thought. So this poor fellow would have to go back to the Penitentiary for another term, and his wife would be forced to drag out a miserable existence to support herself and child. Surely in a civilized and Christian land there should be a more humane system. Criminals, no doubt, had to be checked and taught a severe lesson, but was the present method of punishment as sensible as it might be?

"You will not send me back, will you?" Stairs again anxiously asked.

"No, I shall not send you back," Nathan replied. "Others, most likely, will attend to that. But as you cannot remain undiscovered for any length of time, I advise you to go back of your own accord. It may be much easier if you do."

"No! no!" the unhappy man cried. "Anything but that! I will die first!"

"But you have your wife and child to consider," Nathan reminded.

"I know it, and for their sake I hope to obtain a pardon. Surely I have been punished enough, and mercy will be granted me. I am not well, and another year in that hole will finish me. Oh, I must be free!"

"Then you have gone about it the wrong way, it seems to me. If you had not escaped there might have been some chance of getting you out on parole. But now I am afraid it is too late."

"So you think I should go back? You have been in the Pen, and know what the life there means."

"I certainly do. I was imprisoned unjustly for the

crime of others, so you can form some idea how I suffered. But, come, you are very tired and need a good night's rest. We can talk this all over to-morrow. I am in no mood for an argument now."

Nathan decided to give Stairs his room, while the cot in the kitchen would do for himself. He wanted to be alone that he might think, for his mind was greatly disturbed. After Stairs was in bed, Nathan went back into the other room, but not to rest. He thought of the poor wretch who had come so unexpectedly into his life. What had led him almost to his door? This thought startled him. But for his finding that helpless man most likely he would have met Ned Preston, and what would have been the result? He shuddered as he thought of his burning rage and the vengeance he had vowed upon his enemy. Even now, perhaps, he might be a murderer, for there had been murder in his heart, and he certainly would have killed Preston had he met him that night. The perspiration came out upon his forehead, and his body trembled. A murderer! And Henry Stairs had unconsciously saved him from that terrible deed! But why had the escaped convict happened his way and dropped into the ditch so near his house? He could not believe that it was altogether by chance. There must have been some special reason in it all. Perhaps Stairs had been directed that way. A feeling of awe entered his heart at the thought.

He rose abruptly to his feet and paced rapidly up and down the room. The more he thought about it, the more convinced he became that his life was being directed by Another, stronger and wiser than himself. It also brought to him a sense of comfort. No longer would he give way to the wild ungovernable passion

which had agitated his soul. He would remain calm and self-possessed, trusting that everything would come out all right at last.

He thought, too, of the sleeping man in the next room, and recalled what he had said about his wife and child. He had only wanted another chance, an opportunity to work, and he would have made complete restitution for the wrong he had done. But it had been denied him. Instead, he had been imprisoned, while his wife and child were left without any support. Stairs was not a criminal by nature, but merely driven to the verge of despair through force of circumstances. He believed that there was something radically wrong with such a system. Almost unconsciously he quoted a verse from "The Ballade of Reading Gaol":

> "For man's grim Justice goes its way,
> And will not swerve aside:
> It slays the weak, it slays the strong,
> It has a deadly stride:
> With iron heel it slays the strong,
> The monstrous parricide."

He knew from experience how true were these words. He had come across men in the Penitentiary who should have been forced to work and make such restitution as was possible for the lives they had ruined, for the homes they had broken up, and for the money they had stolen. Those men were placed in safe keeping, and punished according to the law of the land. But their imprisonment did absolutely nothing to remedy the injury they had committed. Such a system did not seem sensible.

Then Ned Preston came into his mind. That he could put the fellow into the Penitentiary he felt cer-

tain. But would that be the best way to deal with the rascal? Would it not be better for him to make restitution for the wrongs he had done? But how could this be carried out? Who was to take up the matter and compel him to do this? If the law took him in hand, he might be imprisoned after a long delay. But the evils he had done would remain. No restoration would be made. That would not be at all satisfactory. Surely there was some other way. Why could he not do it himself? Nathan reasoned. He could meet him face to face, and charge him with his villainy. If Ned would not do as he wished, he would let the law take its course. Four things stood out clearly in his mind—those miserable tenements in the city, Ned's debts to Peter Martin, the cause of Mrs. Watters, and Helen's sad life. Nathan now knew the course he would pursue, and let Preston refuse to obey if he dare.

CHAPTER 11

Restitution

NATHAN slept late the next morning, as he was very tired after his trying experience of the previous day. Stairs stayed in bed until noon, and when he came from his room he looked greatly refreshed. Nathan greeted him cordially, and motioned him to the table where dinner was served.

"You must be hungry after your long fast," he said, "so set to work at once. You look in good shape for the road again."

"I dread the thought of doing that," the visitor replied. "The nearer I get to the city, the more fearful I become. But I must see my wife and child before I am captured and sent back again. It is a long walk, but I do not dare to go on the steamer. It is not safe for me to travel by day, although I did it at times."

While Stairs was eating, Nathan did considerable thinking. It would not be right for him to keep the man for any length of time in his house, knowing that he had escaped from the Penitentiary. It was really his duty to assist the authorities by sending them word about the escaped convict. If he failed to do so, the law might lay hold on him as harboring and hiding the man. Just what the punishment would be he did not know, although the fact that he himself had served a term might make it very unpleasant for him if found

out. But he did not wish to give Stairs up. He would urge him to return of his own free will after he had seen his wife and child. Then a new idea entered his mind, and he wondered why he had not thought of it before. He would take Stairs to the city himself in his small boat. They could go by night, and thus escape observation. He said nothing about it just then, but when Stairs had finished his dinner, and was enjoying a smoke, Nathan turned to him.

"Would you like for me to take you to the city in my boat?" he asked.

"Would you do it?" The expression in the man's eyes showed his eagerness, and he almost dropped the pipe in his excitement. "When? To-night?"

"Perhaps so. It will take me some time to rig up a sail. I shall have to go to the store for cotton first."

"And you really mean it, then?"

"Yes, if you promise me one thing."

"What is that?"

"If after you have seen your wife and child you will give yourself up, and go back and finish out your term."

"Oh, Lord!" Stairs groaned. "How can I! It will mean going to Hell again."

"There is no doubt about that. But most likely you will have to remain there much longer if you don't give yourself up, so you had better decide to do as I advise."

"Is there no way I can get out on parole?" the unhappy man asked. "Others have done so."

"Have you any friends who might intercede for you?"

"Not one, and that was the trouble when I was sentenced to the Pen. No one cared what happened to me or to my family."

"Well, if I undertake to do what I can for you, will

you promise that you will give yourself up after you have seen your wife and child?"

"Yes, I promise," was the low reply. "But for God's sake, do what you can!"

"I shall do all in my power," Nathan assured. "But you stay here now while I go to the store. I want to get to work upon that sail as soon as possible."

Nathan made his way slowly up the road, thinking deeply as he walked. How was he to help Stairs in his trouble? He knew of no person of influence to whom he could turn, and without such help there was very little chance of success. If he had sufficient money he might engage the service of a skilful lawyer. But he had only a few dollars left, and that would not go far he well knew.

He called at Mrs. Watters' to see how Doris was getting along. He had not been there for several days, and he did not know how he would be received. He found the child improving as well as could be expected. Her eyes brightened as the visitor entered her room, and a smile illumined her face. But the widow seemed to be in deep distress. It was evident that she had been crying, while her words and manner told of some trouble that was affecting her. Nathan found it difficult to talk to her, so he stayed but a few minutes. He wondered what was the matter with the woman. He had longed to ask her, but had refrained, feeling that she might resent his interference.

Upon reaching the store, he got his mail, which consisted of the daily paper, and a letter from Black & Muirhead. This he at once opened, and as he read, his eyes widened in amazement, and a slight gasp of astonishment escaped his lips. It was from Mr. Black,

and the tone was most friendly, not like the usual curt business letter.

"Dear Mr. Strong," it began,

"No doubt you know that Matthew Halton died shortly after our visit to him the day he signed that paper. I now wish to inform you that his will names you as the principal beneficiary. This will be gratifying news to you, and I wish to extend my heartiest congratulation. I cannot say now what the estate is worth, as there has been no time as yet go into details. But if you can come to the city at your earliest convenience, we can then go into the matter as fully as possible. Of course, as you are well aware, it will take over a year to get the business settled and the will probated, but the sooner we begin upon the work, the better it will be. Mr. Halton requested me to notify you of this immediately after his death, so I am merely carrying out his wish.

"Yours very truly
"W. J. Black."

Nathan read this letter through twice ere thrusting it into an inside pocket of his coat. It seemed like a wonderful dream from which he would suddenly awake. Matthew Halton had made him his principal beneficiary! He understood the reason. It was the belated restitution of a conscience-stricken man for the wrong he had committed. How much was the estate worth? he wondered. What would people say when they heard the news? And how would it affect Ned Preston? A spirit of exultation possessed him, and he was about to rush from the store to give vent to his excited feelings in a rapid walk home, when he thought of the cotton.

"You must have received startling news to-day," the storekeeper remarked, as he measured off the number of yards required.

"Yes, yes, most startling," Nathan replied.

"Nothing bad, I hope." The storekeeper was very curious, and eyed his customer with considerable interest.

Nathan pretended not to hear as he counted out the money and laid it upon the counter. He then picked up his parcel, and was about to leave the building, when the storekeeper again spoke.

"By the way, Mr. Stone, did you see that account in yesterday's paper about the escape of those prisoners from the Penitentiary?"

"No, I did not. I was in the city, and was very busy. I shall read it, however, when I get home."

"It is reported, Mr. Stone, that one of the escaped men passed this way last night. Bill Tooke is on the lookout for him now."

"Why is Bill so much interested?" Nathan inquired.

"Oh, there is a reward of one hundred dollars offered for the capture of the man. The others have been already taken."

"So Bill hopes to get that reward?"

"He certainly does. He's been on the tramp all day, down the road, I guess. I hope he'll succeed, for he owes me a big store bill."

Nathan was in no mood for further talk, but left the store and hurried homeward. He noted that the wind had veered from the west, and was blowing gently down river. This was most fortunate, and he considered it as a favorable omen. His brain was in a whirl. The information he had received from the lawyer was enough to stir any man. But to learn in addition that a reward was offered for the capture of Henry Stairs, and that Bill Tooke was in pursuit, aroused him to the highest pitch of excitement. He

knew very well that he could not save Stairs from going back to the Penitentiary, but he was determined to do all in his power to take him to his wife and child. And more than that, he wished to defeat Bill Tooke. It was just like the sneak to be hot-footed after a wretched fugitive. If Bill had justice meted out to him he would now be serving a sentence himself behind prison bars.

When Nathan reached home he found Stairs sunning himself in front of the house in full view of the road. This was an unwise thing to do, and when Nathan told him what he had heard, he was greatly alarmed. With trembling hands he read the account in the paper about his escape, and the reward offered for his capture.

"They are sure to get me!" he wailed. "I shall never see my wife and child again!"

"You will have a chance if you keep out of sight and obey me," Nathan replied. "Stay close in the bedroom, and don't show your face for the rest of the day. I must get to work at that sail, and haven't any too much time. I have delayed too long already."

Nathan spent the rest of the afternoon in his shop, and when he had made the mast and yards, he fashioned a lee-board, for there was no centre-board in the small boat. He also put the finishing touches to several chairs and tables which he planned to take with him to the city.

After he had taken Stairs' supper to him in the bedroom, he ate his own in the kitchen. He desired to keep his guest out of sight lest anyone should come unexpectedly to the house and see him. When he had washed the supper dishes, he spread the cotton out upon the floor, and cut it to the right size. Then with a

needle and coarse thread he began to hem the edges and form holes to fasten the sail to the yards. This took him some time, and darkness overtook him before he was half through. But he was in no special hurry now, as he decided to wait until ten o'clock for the ebb-tide. The wind was so light that he would need a favorable current to make much progress. Even then he questioned whether he could reach the city before daylight.

A rap upon the door startled him, and when he had opened it, he saw Peter Martin standing before him. The visitor limped over to a chair and sat down. He viewed with interest as well as curiosity the sail lying upon the floor.

"Off fer a trip, eh?" he queried. "Tired of rowin', I s'pose."

"I am," Nathan replied, as he resumed his sewing. "I am getting lazy these days."

"Say, did ye hear about that escaped prisoner?" Peter asked. "The women folks around here are 'most scared t'death. I believe I jist saw him."

"Where?" Nathan looked up from his work as he spoke.

"Peekin' in at your winder jist a minute ago. As I came from the road I saw a man standin' at the winder over that table. Thinkin' that it was the escaped prisoner, I tried to creep up an' capture him. But he heard me, an' you should have seen the way he took to his heels. It's too bad, fer I might have got that one hundred dollars which is offered."

Outwardly Nathan remained very calm as he picked up one end of the sail and pretended to examine it carefully. But he was greatly concerned. Someone must have been watching his house, and who could it

have been but Bill Tooke? The thought brought an angry glow into his eyes. If he had only caught the sneak prowling around, he would have broken every bone in his body. His anger was rapidly increasing, and this Peter noted.

"It's no wonder ye git mad," he remarked. "What business has a man prowlin' around places at night, peekin' in winders? No one kin tell what mischief he's plannin'. If it hadn't been fer this lame knee of mine, he wouldn't have got off as he did. Confound Ned Preston. He's to blame fer that."

"Perhaps there are some men at liberty who should be in jail," Nathan replied, wishing to change the course of the conversation.

"I know it, Mr. Stone, an' Ned Preston's one of 'em. Have ye heard about poor Widder Watters? Her trouble is due to that villain."

"No, I haven't heard anything lately. But when I called there this afternoon to see her little girl, I noticed that Mrs. Watters was greatly worried about something."

"An' she has cause to be," Peter angrily declared. "That accident to her little lass has meant heavy doctor bills. She's not been able to earn any money since it happened, as she had to stay at home to look after the child. The mortgage interest is now overdue, an' Preston has threatened to foreclose if the amount is not paid at once."

"He has!" The needle dropped from Nathan's fingers, and he stared at his visitor. "The scoundrel!"

"Ay, yer right in that, Mr. Stone," Peter agreed. "He is a scoundrel, an' no mistake. He robbed Mr. Watters, who died of a broken heart. Now he is

robbin' the widder an' the fatherless; that's what he's doin'."

Nathan picked up the needle, and continued his sewing. His mind was now firmly made up. Ned Preston must not be allowed to harm Mrs. Watters. There was a way to stop the villain, and he would do it. There were other scores to settle, as well."

"Do you suppose Preston will carry out his threat?" he at length asked.

"Indeed he will. That man hasn't any soul. Look what he did to me. He robbed me, that's what he did. An' I've been lame ever since."

"Tell me about it, Mr. Martin."

"Why, haven't I told ye already?"

"You did some time ago, but I want to hear it again. He cheated you, did he not?"

"I should say he did. He agreed to give me fifteen dollars a thousand fer all the logs I could git out five winters ago. Then when they were rafted an' shipped, he would only give me seven dollars. So there I was, laid up with a bad knee, an' besides losin' the two thousand dollars which Preston owed me, I had to sell a fine tract of timber to pay other expenses. I was lucky to save me place."

Nathan listened to this story with a new interest. When he had heard it before it had aroused his anger. But then he was unable to do anything. Now, however, it was different, and he would see to it that Preston made proper restitution for the wrong he had done.

Peter rose slowly to his feet, and started for the door. He paused with his hand upon the latch, and looked back.

"Bill Tooke is after that escaped prisoner," he remarked. "He wants to git the reward. But wouldn't

it be a great thing fer the country if criminals who are at large could be rounded up an' put in jail? Bill an' Ned Preston would be there in a jiffy."

"Perhaps there is a better way than putting such people in jail," Nathan replied.

"In what way, Mr. Stone?"

"Why, to force them to make restitution for much of the evil they have done. Putting Preston in jail, for instance, wouldn't help you any. Neither would it relieve Mrs. Watters of the burden she is bearing."

"What d'ye suggest, then? What else could be done?"

"Make him pay what he owes you, and support the widow. That would be much more effective, it seems to me."

"H'm!" Peter grunted, "that might be all right in theory, but how kin it be carried out? It's like the fable of the mice who planned to have a bell placed around the neck of the cat to warn them when she was near. It was a great idea, an' all the mice were delighted. But when one old mouse asked them how they were goin' to git the bell on the cat, they were dumbfounded. They hadn't taken that into account. So when ye talk about makin' Preston pay what he owes, the question is, How is it to be done? an' who is to do it?"

"I am," Nathan quietly replied.

"You!" Peter's eyes bulged with amazement.

"Certainly. Do you doubt my word?"

"Oh, no, I don't doubt yer word, though I do doubt yer sense. I allus considered you a man of good jedgment, but I guess I'll have to change me mind. You force Ned Preston to pay his debts! I'll only believe it when I see it."

Nathan felt somewhat annoyed at these words, although he made no further reply, but worked steadily away after his visitor had departed. He knew it was but natural for Peter to treat his boast with scorn. Was it not the way of the world? But a feeling of strength and superiority rose within him. He would show Peter, and others, too, for that matter, that the humble carpenter was a force to be reckoned with. Ere long Halton's money would be at his disposal, and money meant power. Then he had the signed document which would bring Preston to terms. Oh, yes, Peter might scoff now, but he would show him what he could do.

He thrust his right hand into an inside pocket of his coat, and touched a folded paper hidden there. That touch brought a gleam to his eyes and a smile to his face. It was the magic wand that would work wonders.

CHAPTER 12

The Flight

THE tide had been running down for about half an hour when Nathan pushed his boat from the shore and sprang in. He had the chairs and tables on board, with Henry Stairs seated in their midst. This was done as a precaution, lest he should be observed from any craft they might meet. Nathan shipped the sail, seized the oars, and rowed the boat out into midstream. He then ceased rowing, settled himself comfortably astern, and drew the sail up to the gentle breeze. Thus with wind and tide favoring them, they slipped noiselessly down the river.

It was a beautiful night, the heavens thickly studded with stars. Lights twinkled from houses along the shore, and the glare of rapidly-moving autos could be plainly seen. Voices of men and women drifted across the water, and at times they passed close to groups of campers. Complete silence was maintained on board the little craft, as this was considered advisable. They wished to run no risk lest they should betray their whereabouts to any who might be spying upon their movements. But both were doing considerable thinking. Stairs was looking hopefully forward to meeting his wife and child, and now that he was on the last lap to the city he was consumed with feverish excitement. Nathan, on the other hand, was musing over

the strange course of events which was causing him to make this voyage. What a peculiar thing life was, after all. A year ago he was a prisoner, with hope low in his heart like the poor fellow near him. Now he was his own master, to go where he willed, and with the proof of his complete innocency secure in his pocket. And soon he would be a rich man, able to take his place once more among men, and with the stain wiped forever from his name. And he had Preston at his mercy, to force him to do as he commanded.

His thoughts naturally turned to Helen. Although she could never belong to him, he loved her as of old, and he would shield her, if possible, to the last. He would not bring sorrow and disgrace upon her if he could help it. Never for a moment did he doubt Preston's willingness to obey him to the letter.

Ere long the wind died down entirely, and the river became as smooth as glass. Nathan again took to the oars, and with long steady strokes drove the boat onward. They passed River View, where, late though it was, the place was brilliantly lighted, and the sound of merrymakers drifted to them across the water. Nathan wondered if Preston was spending the night there in drinking and revelling, while his wife was keeping her lone vigil at home. How he longed to go ashore, and if he found the villain there, to expose his crime to his companions. What a delight it would be to see him shrink back, and turn deadly pale with fear and consternation. The temptation was hard to resist, and intuitively he turned the boat shoreward. This was only a sudden impulse, however, and the next instant he swerved back to his former course, and continued on his way.

Thus hour after hour Nathan bent to the oars, and the dawn of a new day was brightening the far-off eastern horizon when two-thirds of the voyage had been made. He was tired and disappointed, as he had hoped to reach the city before day-break. This was now out of the question, so it would be necessary to remain in some secluded place and wait until darkness had again enshrouded the land. He had got Stairs this far, so he did not wish to run any risk by landing him in the city in broad daylight.

For another half hour he continued his rowing, when observing a little cove where the trees stood thick around, and with no house visible, he ran the boat ashore. Stairs was asleep, so letting him remain where he was, he sat down upon the gravel, and ate part of the lunch he had brought with him. Ere long he was joined by his companion, who had aroused from his slumber with a start, and had stepped quickly ashore.

"I thought something had happened to us," he remarked, as he ate some of the food Nathan offered to him. "It was a bad dream, I guess. Where are we, anyway?"

"Held up for the day," Nathan explained. "We failed to reach the city, so must stay here for the day. I am going to have a sleep, so advise you to do the same. It's just as well to keep out of sight, for we can't tell who might be prowling around."

"You sleep while I keep watch," Stairs replied. "I've had a good rest already. If anyone comes this way, I'll give you warning, so we can get away in time."

Nathan merely smiled, being too tired to enter into any conversation. He took one of the two blankets he had brought with him, selected a comfortable place in

the midst of several small thick fir trees, and in a short time was fast asleep.

He was aroused by a cry of fear, causing him to leap to his feet. What time of the day it was he did not know. Rushing toward him was Stairs, his eyes big with terror, and his body trembling violently.

"What's the matter?" Nathan demanded, coming forth into the open.

"The Police! The Police!" Stairs gasped.

"Where?"

"Up there, coming this way."

"To the boat, quick," Nathan ordered.

In another minute they were both on board, and Nathan was rowing hard away from the shore. He could see uniformed men running down the bank, while one, who seemed to be the leader, called to him to stop or they would shoot. But Nathan paid no heed to the order. He rowed harder than ever, straight for the opposite shore. Several revolver shots rang out, but they did no harm.

"We're in for it now," Nathan panted, as he rested for a few seconds and wiped his moist forehead. "We're making matters worse, I know, but I'm going to get you to your wife and child, and then I'm done with you."

Stairs made no reply, but crouched in the bottom of the boat in fear and dejection. The sight of the Police had unnerved him. The old terror of capture overwhelmed him, and the vision of his lonely cell, and perhaps solitary confinement, loomed before his mind.

"I won't go back!" he at length wailed. "I will die first! But I must see my wife and child."

"Come, brace up," Nathan encouraged. "Don't talk that way."

"But what am I to do? The Police will get us both when we reach the city."

"Will they? I am not altogether sure of that."

Nathan was rowing hard again, and was drawing closer to the opposite shore. Occasionally he turned and looked ahead, and what he at last saw filled him with hope. It was a large motor-boat, where two men were preparing to depart. He ceased rowing, stood up, and hailed them. He then turned to Stairs.

"You are to be the sick man," he said. "You must play your part well."

"What do you mean? What are you going to do?"

"Get you to the city in that motor-boat. You must go to the hospital. See?"

"I do. Now I understand. Yes, I'll be a very sick man. And I won't be pretending, either, for I never felt worse in my life."

In a few minutes they were alongside of the motor-boat, and Nathan briefly explained what he wanted, and the need for haste. The two men looked at Stairs huddled in the bottom of the small boat, and at once agreed to go as fast as possible.

"We are just leaving for the city, anyway," one of them said, "so it will be no trouble."

With their assistance Stairs was carefully transferred to the motor-boat, and placed in a comfortable position. The rowboat was fastened to the buoy, and they were off. As they cut through the water, Nathan glanced anxiously back to the place where the policeman had disturbed them, but no sign of them could be seen. He felt certain that they would hurry back to the city and be there when they landed. The high-powered engine throbbed and the boat raced forward, although

it was all too slow for the anxious man. The owners of the craft paid little attention to him, and if they noted his worry at all, they, no doubt, attributed it to his concern for his sick companion. Stairs acted his part to perfection, and kept up a constant moaning.

"What ails the fellow, anyway?" one of the boatmen at length asked.

"It's hard to say," Nathan replied. "That's why I want to get him to the city as fast as possible. He was taken bad just a short time ago."

It took them but half an hour to reach their destination, and the boat moored close to a wharf where a steamer was just tying up.

"This is fortunate," Nathan remarked, "as I can get one of those autos. How much do I owe you men for your kindness?"

"Nothing," one of them emphatically replied. "You haven't put us out, and we were only too glad to help you."

Having thanked them, Nathan hurried away, and in a few minutes an auto was backing down to the boat. Stairs was placed on board, and they were whirled away. Nathan breathed a sigh of relief as they moved through the crowded streets. No sign of the policemen did he see, and he was thankful that he had succeeded in eluding them so far. He tried to arouse his companion, telling him that he could get well now. Stairs, however, made no reply, but sat huddled in his seat, leaning heavily against Nathan. The latter became alarmed and looked anxiously into Stairs' face. He noticed that it was very white and haggard. He knew now that the man was really sick and in much distress. Again he spoke and gave Stairs a slight shake. Receiving no reply, he was forced to wait

while the auto glided on its way. The driver had his direction, so it should not take long to reach their destination.

In a few minutes the auto stopped in front of a miserable ramshackle house in a wretched part of the city. The driver opened the door, and Nathan briefly explained the situation.

"We must carry this man into the house," he said, "as he is unconscious. But find out first if Mrs. Stairs lives here."

The driver did as he was ordered, and returned shortly with the information that Mrs. Stairs was at home, and lived in the top flat. Lifting the helpless man from the car, they carried him into the building and up the rickety stairs. It was a difficult task, and by the time they reached the top landing they were both panting heavily. Nathan knocked at the only door in sight, and when this was almost immediately opened, a woman appeared. A frightened look came into her eyes when she saw the two strange men. Then she gave a startled cry, took a quick step forward, and threw her arms about her husband's neck.

"Henry! Henry! What is the matter?" she asked.

But no reply came from that silent form, so relaxing her arms, she allowed the men to carry Stairs into the room. She followed and pointed to a cot against the wall. Here the men deposited their burden, and then Nathan glanced around. What a desolate place it was, with scarcely any furniture, except one broken chair, a box which evidently served as a table, and the cot.

"Are you Mrs. Stairs?" he asked, turning to the woman. He knew very well that she was, but he had

to say something, and that was all he could think of just then.

But the woman made no reply. She sank upon the floor by her husband's side, and took one of his hands in hers.

"Speak to me, Henry," she pleaded. "It is Martha. Don't you know me?"

Seeing that her words were of no avail, she looked up into Nathan's face.

"Is he dying?" she whispered. "Oh, don't say that he is!"

"He is very sick, I fear," Nathan replied. "We must get a doctor at once."

"A doctor! How am I to pay for a doctor? Look," and the woman leaped to her feet, "all I possess is what you see here. How am I to pay for a doctor?"

"Then I will," Nathan emphatically declared. "This man must have medical aid. I shall go and telephone immediately."

He started for the door, but stopped and looked back.

"Is this the way you have been living, Mrs. Stairs?"

"Living! Starving, you mean, and my child, too. Now she is in the hospital, and I shall soon be in the Insane Asylum. I have sold nearly everything to live. But my child needed more than I could provide, so I sent her to the hospital. And to-morrow I am to be turned out on the street because I can't pay the rent. Oh, what am I to do, now that Henry has come home sick!"

"Who is going to turn you out on the street?" Nathan demanded.

"Why, Mr. Preston, of course. He owns this house,

and several more adjoining. Anyone who doesn't pay on the dot is turned out. He is a hard man."

For a few seconds Nathan stared at the woman, and only with difficulty controlled the rage that swept upon him. Mrs. Stairs noted the angry expression in his eyes, and shrank back a little.

"I couldn't help it," she explained, thinking that Nathan was blaming her for her miserable condition. "Nellie was sick and I could not leave her to go to work, so there is no money to pay the rent."

"I am not blaming you, Mrs. Stairs." Nathan had control of himself now. "I was only thinking of the wretch who is about to turn you out on the street. But, there, we must not talk any longer at present, as your husband needs assistance at once.

He hurried out of the room and down the stairs. He was about to step out upon the street when three policemen confronted him, and laid firm hands upon him.

"We want you," one of them said. "And where is the man who was with you?"

Nathan hardly heard these words, for he had caught sight of Bill Tooke standing a little apart, his face beaming with triumph. How he longed to spring forward and lay violent hands upon the sneak. In fact, he did make an impulsive movement, but the grips upon his arms tightened.

"None of that," he heard one of the policemen say. "Don't try that game upon us. Where is Henry Stairs?"

"Up there," and Nathan motioned to the top flat. "But for God's sake, don't go up there now! The man's dying, and I've just come down to phone for a doctor."

"Look here, stop this nonsense," was the stern order. "Do you think well believe such stuff as that? Get in there," and the speaker pointed to the car. "And see that you don't try any of your fooling, either. We'll look after the dying man, all right."

CHAPTER 13

Behind Prison Bars

SO ONCE again Nathan found himself behind prison doors, alone with his thoughts. Although this cell in which he was confined was different from his former ones, yet it seemed almost like home. The sounds he heard were quite familiar, and looking through the little barred window in the door he could see other prisoners walking up and down the enclosed space outside. He was glad to be alone that he might think over all that had taken place. His brain was in a tumult, and his heart charged with anger and indignation. On his way to the jail he had thought of Mr. Black, and he had asked the turnkey to phone to him requesting him to come to him at once. He knew that he would need legal advice, and he believed that the lawyer would do all that he could on his behalf.

As he paced up and down his small cell, he mused over the strange twist of Fate which had placed him again in such a serious position. How long was this injustice to continue? he asked himself. Why should he, an innocent man, be thus treated, while the guilty ones were free? Most likely he would be charged with abetting and aiding Henry Stairs, an escaped convict, and what the punishment would be he had no idea. And should he once more be committed to the Penitentiary, his plans concerning Ned Preston could not be carried out. He wanted to go to him, confront

him, and compel him to bow to his will. But now all this would be frustrated, and nothing would be accomplished. Preston would deprive Mrs. Watters of her home, he would turn Mrs. Stairs out upon the street, he would continue his neglect of Helen, and go on with his evil manner of living. Nathan lifted his right hand and pressed the pocket which contained Halton's confession. How useless appeared that document now, and when would he be able to use it? Only a short time before he had been confident of success, but now his hopes seemed shattered, and all because Henry Stairs had crossed his path.

His thoughts turned to that scene on the river bank when the policeman had arrived. Who had summoned them? It must have been Bill Tooke, he was well aware, for he had seen him in front of the Stairs' house. Had he followed them through the night, spied out their hiding place, and notified the Police? Most likely that was what he had done. But did he have an accomplice? Had he walked the whole of that distance? Perhaps someone had taken him in his car, and who else would that one be but Ned Preston? Perhaps the two were working together. Bill wished to obtain the reward offered for the capture of the fugitive. But he wanted revenge as well. And Ned Preston was anxious to get the man he feared out of the way, and once more securely locked up in the Penitentiary. It all seemed reasonable to Nathan as he brooded over the matter. And they had succeeded in their efforts!

Although he tried to keep calm, yet his heart was hot within him. He felt like a caged lion. His enemies had accomplished their designs, and he longed to break his prison bars that he might set upon them, confound their schemes, and expose them to the glare of the world.

Such were his thoughts when Mr. Black arrived, and never was Nathan more pleased to see anyone than the face of the worthy lawyer. He related to him the full story since his finding of the fugitive by the side of the road to the time he left him to telephone for a doctor. Mr. Black was a most interested listener, jotting down the details in a note book.

"I must see Stairs," he said when Nathan had finished. "I hope he has recovered sufficiently for me to talk with him, as it will mean so much to you. My! this is a gloomy place," and he shivered as he glanced around the cell. "I think I can get you out on bail."

"When will my case come up?" Nathan asked.

"In the morning, and I want to do all I can to get you acquitted. It will never do to allow you to be sent up for trial. You see, we've got that Halton estate to settle. Yes, I'll go and get you out on bail at once. I think I can arrange it."

"Let me stay just where I am," Nathan replied. "I don't mind it so much now since I've had this talk with you. I am used to a place like this, remember. Never mind about me now, but go and see how poor Stairs is getting along. And do what you can for his wife. Don't let Preston turn her out on the street. Pay the rent, and I will make it good when I get some money."

Nathan slept well that night, for he was very tired after his trying experiences. He was greatly refreshed when he awoke, and ready for whatever adventures the day might bring forth. Life held much in store for him now, and if he could only get out of this difficulty, he could go straight ahead.

At the appointed time he was taken with other prisoners into the court room, and seated on the long bench to await his turn. His companions in distress

all wore woe-begone expressions. There were several "drunks," and they showed most plainly the effects of their recent carousals. Two were up for theft, and one for a more serious offense. When these cases had been dealt with, some being fined and others remanded, Nathan was called. He told his story in a straightforward manner, not in a pleading, whining voice as had some of the others. His speech and manner made a favorable impression upon the police magistrate and the spectators. He was closely cross-examined, but he passed triumphantly through the ordeal.

Bill Tooke was next called. As he told his story, Nathan learned that what he had surmised the evening before was true. He swore that he had been on the lookout for Stairs, and when he learned that he was travelling down the river road, he trailed him to Nathan Stone's house. And there he had seen him through the window one night, and he was hiding among the bushes when he left in the boat for the city. He had travelled down the road, and when the two had landed early in the morning, he had phoned to the Police, and then showed them the place where the men were hiding.

It was quite evident that Bill received much pleasure in telling of his detective work, and several times he glanced at Nathan. When he was through, Mr. Black asked him if he had walked the entire distance that night, and he replied that a man had taken him in his car. When pressed to tell who the man was, he said that it was Edward Preston. Nathan knew that Ned was in the court room among the spectators, and a thrill of pleasure came over him. Tooke had not been alone in his detective work, that was quite evident.

When Mr. Black's turn came to sum up the evidence, he made a masterly speech on behalf of his

client. He was known far and wide as a most clever lawyer, and a man of unimpeachable character. His words, accordingly, bore great weight, and all listened to him with special attention. He traced the story from the night Nathan had found Henry Stairs lying practically unconscious by the side of the road, how he had taken him to his own house, and cared for him. Then moved by pity, he had arranged to conduct the fugitive to his wife and child. This was only upon the condition that Stairs would give himself up of his own free will after he had visited his family. In proof of this, he read Stairs' own sworn statement made at the Public Hospital where he had been taken owing to his illness.

"Stairs is a sick man," he said with solemn emphasis. "He is also an escaped convict, and in the eyes of the law his sworn statement which you have just heard is of no account. But I have read it that you may know and judge for yourselves. He thinks that he is dying, and perhaps he is, and as a dying man he would have nothing to gain by swearing to a lie. He was a sick man when found by Nathan Strong by the side of the road. It is the firm conviction of the doctor who is now attending him that if he is sent back to the Penitentiary he will not live long. Even now he has only a fighting chance, and needs the greatest care. In every heart which is human there surely must be sympathy to-day for this unfortunate man. In the Penitentiary he was not well, and so overmastering was his desire to see his wife and child once more before death claimed him, that he took a desperate chance when the opportunity came. And what was the condition of his home when he arrived? His only child was sick in the hospital, and his wife ready to be turned out

upon the street by a merciless landlord. Nearly every scrap of furniture had been sold by Mrs. Stairs to provide food for herself and little one. Anyone who will take the trouble to go to that miserable house will see for himself what a wretched place it is, a totally unfit abode for human beings. And this, remember, is right in our city, at our very doors, and we were ignorant of it, or closed our eyes to the disgrace. My client here has been the means of bringing this to our notice. He did not harbor and abet an escaped fugitive. On the contrary, he acted the part of a wise counsellor, and proved himself a friend to a man in need. He might have handed Stairs over to the authorities, and thus claimed the reward that was offered. He did nothing of the kind—that was done by another, who according to his own words and manner of speech took a diabolical delight in his deed."

The lawyer's closing words were most impressive. He urged that his client be set free at once. An injustice had been done to him, and all worthy citizens would rejoice at his acquittal.

This speech affected all very keenly, and it was no surprise when the police magistrate, after he had reviewed the case, discharged the prisoner. He warned him of the great risk he had run in fleeing from the Police when they had ordered him to return to the shore. But considering his motive, and the wise counsel he had given the fugitive, he felt that it was only right that he should be acquitted. He spoke, too, in most caustic words of what Mr. Black had said about Henry Stairs' home, and urged those present to take immediate steps to assist his wife, and compel the landlord to remedy the wretched condition of the house.

Nathan and the lawyer walked slowly down the stone

steps leading from the court house, and out upon the street. They were silent for a while, each being wrapped in his own thoughts. The sound of the one o'clock gong aroused Mr. Black from his meditation.

"Come and have lunch with me, Mr. Strong," he invited. "There are several important matters I wish to discuss with you."

"Thanks," Nathan replied. "I did not realise until now how hungry I am. I cannot begin to tell you how grateful I am for what you have done for me this morning. Some day I hope to repay you for your kindness."

"And repay others for their kindness, eh?" the lawyer queried.

"Indeed I shall, Mr. Black. One man, especially, shall have my immediate attention. He was in the court room, as you no doubt noticed."

"Yes, I saw him, and I understand what you mean."

CHAPTER 14

Stern Terms

NATHAN spent part of the afternoon with Mr. Black discussing Matthew Halton's estate. He heard the lawyer's voice as he read out the list of bonds, mortgages, debentures, and other investments. But his mind was elsewhere, and he was impatient to be away from the office.

"Look here, Mr. Black," he at length interrupted, "I am not much interested in all this just now, so suppose we put it off until another day."

"Not interested!" the lawyer exclaimed in amazement. "Why, man, what is the matter with you? Think of the fortune that has been left to you."

"There was a time when it would have meant everything to me," Nathan slowly replied. "But it is different now. Money has but little fascination for me. To work and make an honest living is all that I desire. I am a carpenter, a builder, and a repairer, and my happiest moments are those when I am working at my trade. I have seen how money in abundance often brings misery instead of happiness. No, let me get back to my work, and the fulfillment of my plans, and you can look after Halton's estate for me. I may change my mind later, but at present I am in no mood for this business."

"And do you intend to spend the rest of your life

in the country?" the lawyer asked. "Why not move to the city?"

"How could I enjoy life here? I like the country, its great open spaces, the freshness of the air, and the quietness of it all. Then at night when my work is done, there is the restfulness of my house, my books, meditation, and undisturbed sleep. What more could any man desire?"

"But have you reached that stage yet, Mr. Strong?"

"What do you mean?"

"Have you not your name to clear?"

"I have not forgotten that. As soon as you are through with me I am going to see Preston. I may need your assistance."

"And you shall have it. You have Halton's confession, I suppose?"

"Yes, it is safe in my pocket."

"So you intend to expose Preston?"

"Not if he obeys my orders. He must make as full restitution as he can for the wrongs he has committed."

Then as briefly as possible Nathan explained his plan for bringing Preston to task.

"But that won't be sufficient punishment," the lawyer replied when Nathan had ended. "That fellow should be sent to the Penitentiary."

"Perhaps so, but that won't make amends for the wrong he has done. It will not relieve Mrs. Watters in her distress, it will not compensate Peter Martin for his loss, neither will it improve those miserable tenement houses which Preston owns in this city."

Nathan said not a word about his wish to shield Helen, and the lawyer suspected nothing.

"Imprisonment is all right for a certain class of criminals, no doubt," he continued. "But in other

cases it works a great injustice to the innocent to whom no restitution is ever made by the ones who committed the injuries. I am not a lawyer, and have nothing to do with the making the laws of our land. I am merely taking a commonsense view, and intend to try it out upon Ned Preston, at any rate."

"I am afraid your plan will not work, Mr. Strong. It is contrary to all law and precedent."

"But not contrary to the precedent of nations, it seems to me."

"In what way?"

"Surely you should know. Suppose the nations of the world treated one of their number which has committed serious wrongs in the same manner as we treat an individual offender, what would be the outcome? That nation would never be able to make any restitution. Take Germany, for instance. We know that she stands convicted as a thief and a murderer on the most colossal scale. Yet the cry is to-day that she must not be put down and out, but should be given a chance to remedy some of the terrible injuries she has done. Cripple her trade, crush her, obliterate her, so to speak, and what would be the result? She would never be able to make amends for her ghastly deeds, neither could she pay her enormous debts now due to the ones she has harmed. She must be given an opportunity to make good as far as possible. Now, if such a policy is considered advisable in dealing with a criminal nation, why is not the same reasonable method used in reference to the individual? But it is not, and that is what surprises me."

Nathan suddenly paused, and looked at the lawyer.

"Pardon me," he said with a slight smile. "Why

should I talk to you like this? You, like everyone else, will consider me a fool for suggesting such ideas."

"No, I do not, Mr. Strong," the lawyer emphatically declared. "I like to hear your views; they are most refreshing. I quite agree with you."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Mr. Black. Ned Preston has injured many. He is a villain, and must be punished. But why shut him up, thus making it impossible for him to remedy the wrongs he has committed? No, far better to compel him to make restitution, and that is what I intend to do. What is commonsense with a criminal nation, is surely the same when dealing with a criminal individual."

"Well, I wish you success," Mr. Black replied. "But it is well to remember that Preston is a shrewd, tricky man, so you will have to be very careful. If you need my assistance, I am always at your command. And, by the way, I am going to place some money to your credit in the Atlantic Bank. Although you may not care for money, you may find use for it sooner than you expect."

On his way from the lawyer's office Nathan bought a copy of the evening paper from a newsboy. Coming to a square, he sat down upon one of the benches and began to read the account of the trial. It was displayed in big headlines, and told in detail of the escape of Henry Stairs from the Penitentiary, and his capture by the Police after an exciting chase. Credit was given to Bill Tooke for the part he had taken, and how he would receive the reward which had been offered. The miserable condition of the Stairs' home was also mentioned, that the wife was about to be turned out on the street for non-payment of her rent, and that she had sold nearly all of her furniture to provide food for

herself and sick child. A large space was devoted to Nathan's trial, and Mr. Black's able defense. Part of his address was given, as well as the scathing remarks by the police magistrate in reference to the miserable tenement in which Mrs. Stairs was living. It closed with an earnest appeal to all citizens to assist the unfortunate woman, and to force the landlord to improve the condition of his houses.

Nathan read all this with great interest, and then sat for a while lost in thought. His mind turned to Henry Stairs, and he longed to do something to get the man pardoned. Some one better known than himself should prepare a Petition and get it signed. Mr. Black was just the man, and he would ask him to do it.

He rapidly retraced his steps to the office, and suggested his plan to the lawyer. The latter smiled as he picked up a paper lying upon his desk.

"I have already done it," he replied. "Several leading men spoke to me to-day about it, so I have drawn up this Petition. Copies will be made and placed throughout the city. I feel certain that thousands will gladly sign it. You may be assured that I shall do all in my power to obtain a pardon for Stairs. I am well acquainted with the Minister of Justice, and hope to see him myself and make a personal appeal."

Perfectly satisfied, and thanking the worthy lawyer, Nathan again left the office, and went at once to Preston's place of business. When he entered the waiting-room he found several people already there, seated upon benches arranged against the walls. He was informed by a young woman that Mr. Preston was busy, so he would have to take his turn in seeing him.

Nathan was thus forced to wait and possess his soul in patience. He glanced around upon his com-

panions, and noted that they were nearly all women, and poorly dressed. Their appearance told of dejection, and whenever Preston's loud, threatening voice sounded from the office, their faces betrayed their fears. This was all very interesting to Nathan, and a feeling of satisfaction came into his heart. He had the power to help these unfortunate people, and as he listened to Preston, although he could not understand what he was saying, he smiled, thinking how soon the man would be pleading for mercy instead of threatening.

At length the office door was flung open, and a woman came out. She was crying, and held a handkerchief to her eyes. Preston followed, and glared upon those waiting outside.

"Next!" he roared, and then returned to his desk.

Nathan at once arose and made for the door. But the young woman in attendance confronted him.

"There are several before you, sir," she said. "You must wait your turn."

"Oh, I guess it's my turn now, all right," Nathan replied, as he pushed her gently aside and entered the office. He closed the door and walked at once to the desk where Preston, with head bent, was examining a paper.

"I am next," Nathan began, and at these words Preston looked quickly up. Then seeing who it was, he rose to his feet.

And truly there was reason for the pallor which suddenly appeared in the man's face. Instead of finding before him one of his cringing, whining tenants, he beheld the last man in the whole world he wished to see. Drawn to his full height, and with his keen piercing eyes, he seemed to Preston like an avenging demon.

He cowered, shrank back as from a blow, and sank down heavily into his swivel-chair. In another minute he had somewhat recovered his composure, and the light of defiance shone in his eyes.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "And what do you want?"

"Don't you know me?" Nathan asked.

"Why, yes, I believe I do. You are Stone, the carpenter, who fixed my fence."

"And only got part of my pay," was the retort.

"I paid you enough for what you did. Is that why you are here? I shall not give you a cent more."

"Ned!" the word was spoken very quietly, but it sent a chill through Preston's soul.

"Well, what is it? Out with it."

"I guess you know me, all right. And you know, too, that I have not come here for that half dollar you owe me. I have come to meet the man who ruined my life, and married the woman I love."

"Ruined your life!" Preston gasped, while his hands gripped hard the edge of his desk.

"Yes, ruined my life. You stole those bonds, Ned, and I was punished for your crime."

Preston tried to make some reply, but his lips would not utter the words. Nathan rejoiced in the man's abject appearance, and determined to lengthen the agony as much as possible.

"What's wrong with you, anyway, Ned?" he asked. "You don't seem to be comfortable."

"There's nothing wrong with me. You'll soon learn that to your sorrow if you don't get out at once."

"Oh, you won't undertake anything like that, Ned. You should know why I am here. I have come to

get satisfaction for the injury you did me. You stole those bonds, and laid the blame on me."

"You lie, you confounded villain. This is a hold-up. I shall call the Police, and have you arrested. You should never have been let out of the Penitentiary."

"You tried to get me back again, when you aided Bill Tooke, didn't you? But that scheme failed. You hoped to trap me, but now you are trapped yourself, for you are at my mercy."

"Am I? In what way? You charged me with stealing those bonds. Where is your proof?"

"Right here," and Nathan placed a hand over the pocket which contained the confession. "Do you doubt my word?"

"Certainly. Do you think I'm a fool? But, there, I haven't time to talk to you any longer. People are waiting for me outside."

"Let them wait, Ned. They'll have to wait for you much longer when you're behind prison bars. Now, look here, you stole those bonds, and I have complete proof of it."

"Where did you get it?"

"From Matthew Halton."

This was more than Preston expected. He stared at his accuser, his face blanched with fear.

"But Halton is dead," he found voice to gasp.

"I know he is. But before he died he made a full confession in the presence of a lawyer, while two persons witnessed his signature. I have it with me now."

"Let me see it," and Preston reached out a trembling hand.

"There it is," Nathan replied, holding forth the document. "I shall read it, if you wish."

Preston, however, remained silent. He crouched in his chair, his eyes glaring hard at the man before him. He seemed more like a wild beast, ready to spring, than a human being.

"Let me read it," he presently requested. "I want to see the words with my own eyes."

"No, it doesn't leave my hand, Ned," Nathan declared, as he thrust the paper back into his pocket. "It is safer with me than with you."

"You'll use that, I suppose, to put me in the Penitentiary. Preston's words were weighted with fear and despair.

"Perhaps so. But it all depends upon yourself."

"Upon myself! Why, what can I do? You've got me in your clutches, and you can do what you like with me. But for God's sake, don't put me behind the bars! Anything but that!"

"So you wouldn't like a dose of your own medicine, eh? You had no hesitation about giving it to me. But I am going to give you a chance, providing you obey my commands. There is a way whereby you can save yourself."

"Is there! What is it? Money? Name your price, and we will settle at once."

"Yes, money is part of the price, but not for myself. I am not in need, as Halton left me most of his estate."

"He did! How much was he worth?" Preston was again the eager, grasping, money-loving fiend. Nathan noted this, and he was more disgusted than ever.

"I do not know how much he was worth. But what difference does that make to you? I should think you would be sick at the thought of money after what you have done. No, I do not want money for myself, but for others you have wronged."

"Others I have wronged! Who are they, pray?"

"You must surely know. If not, I shall enlighten you. Unless you wish to go to the Penitentiary, I command you to lift the mortgage from Widow Watters' place, and to pay her the money you stole from her husband. There now, keep quiet," Nathan sternly ordered, as Preston started to protest. "And you are to make complete compensation to Peter Martin for the contemptible way you treated him several winters ago. You owe him two thousand dollars, at least, for the logs you got from him. You cheated him, and you know it. Then, you are to put those miserable tenement houses of yours in good repair, and treat your tenants as human beings, and charge them a reasonable rent. And further, you are to give up your disgraceful manner of living, such as drink and fast women, spend more of your evenings at home, and be a good husband to your wife, the best woman on earth. These are some of the conditions, and I may think of others later."

Preston was standing when Nathan finished, his body trembling, and his face white with rage.

"You devil!" he cried. "Do you expect me to do all that? Do you take me for a fool?"

"You will be a fool, Ned, if you don't. Refuse, and you can put up with the consequences."

"But your demands are too hard, they are unjust."

"Are they as hard as what you meted out to me? This is merely justice, and if you are wise you will accept my demands. I want your answer at once.

Preston again slumped down into his chair, and remained silent for a few minutes. He was thinking deeply, and Nathan wondered what was passing

through his mind. He thrummed upon the desk with the fingers of his right hand, while his eyes gazed unseeingly at the wall before him. He was in a tight corner, and knew it. But Preston was not a man to be easily downed. It was his nature to struggle fiercely, and when beaten in one direction, he would always seek some other way. Any method that would serve his purpose he never hesitated to use. As a rule, he threatened, and he had found this satisfactory, especially with those who could not help themselves. But when graciousness was needed, he could be all that, and more, too. The serpent's heart could feign repentance. The saying of the writer of old was applicable to him, "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords." In this manner he generally gained advantage over any unsuspecting opponents.

"Look here, Nathan," he at last began, "I know you have got me in a nasty trap, and I deserve it. I certainly did treat you in a most criminal way, and I should go to the Penitentiary for it. I am really surprised that you are so merciful to me. Yes, I will agree to your demands, and make whatever restitution I can. But give me a little time, say a week, in which to do so. It will take longer to make arrangements about repairing my houses, although I shall set to work at once. If in seven days restitution is not made to Mrs. Watters and Peter Martin, then you can go ahead and expose me. Will you accept my word of honor?"

"I am willing to give you a week, Ned, but for heaven's sake, leave out about your word of honor,"

Nathan icily replied. "You haven't the least spark of honor in your soul, as you have only agreed to this under stern compulsion. But, remember, if seven days from now you have not fulfilled my demands, Mr. Black, of the firm of Black & Muirhead, will take charge, and you know something about him."

"So Black is your lawyer, eh?"

"He is, and he knows all about Halton's confession."

"Good Lord! This is awful!"

"It is, and it will be more awful if you try any nonsense. And don't overlook what I said about your giving up drink and fast women. There is Helen, also, to be considered."

"Has Helen been saying anything to you?" Preston asked this question as calmly as he could, but his voice betrayed his anger.

"No, she has not. The only time I have spoken to her since obtaining my freedom was the day I repaired your fence. She had no idea who I was, and not likely she knows yet."

"But you couldn't disguise yourself from me. I knew you the minute I set my eyes on you."

"I guess it was your conscience, Ned, and not your eyes. I am giving you the credit of having a conscience, which is going a long way."

"You seem to consider me a regular devil, Nathan."

"And haven't I good reason if I do? Would anyone with the slightest spark of manhood do what you did to me? Why I am amazed at myself for my patience. Some men, if their lives had been ruined as mine has, would have tracked you down and shot you on sight. But thank God, I am different."

"You want revenge, nevertheless."

"Revenge! Yes, but revenge that will do the most good to the ones you have injured. Mine is a new kind which, perhaps, you are incapable of understanding. It is the Master revenge. I shall leave you now, but, remember."

CHAPTER 15

A Helping Hand

NATHAN went at once to see Mr. Black, and related to him his conversation with Preston. The lawyer was greatly interested, although he shook his head doubtfully.

"I hope it will work out all right," he replied, when Nathan had ended. "But Preston is a tricky man, and will endeavor to crawl out of the trap some way. He has been in tight corners before, so he knows all the ways."

"But he won't get clear this time," Nathan stoutly asserted. "I have given him just one week. If at the end of that time he has not obeyed my orders, I am going to ask you to take the case in hand. When he finds out that I mean business, it will make a great difference. I am going home to rest, and await developments."

"Back to your retreat, eh?" the lawyer queried. "How I envy you."

"Envy me! What for?"

"Your life in the open these beautiful days. I was born in the country, with hills all around, the forest near, meadows, river and lakes. Yet I left them all to spend a life of drudgery here in the city."

"You seem to thrive upon it, though, Mr. Black. You look so hale and hearty."

"That may be true," and the lawyer smiled somewhat

sadly. "See that," and he pointed to a piece of paper pinned to his desk. "I found that several years ago. It is a translation from the Chorus of an ancient writer. Listen,

> "Oh, take me to the mountains! Oh,
> Past the great pines, and through the wood,
> Up where the lean hounds softly go
> A-whine for the wild things' blood."

"Now, those words stir me, and do you know, I visit the hills every morning in my mind. I wander through the woods and meadows. I take a refreshing dip in the lake where I used to swim as a boy. I fish in the old brook, drink from the ice-cold spring, lie in the newly-mown hay, sleep in my little bed at night and hear the rain beating on the roof. And living that life over every morning, puts me in good trim for the duties of the day. It is a great tonic."

"I understand," Nathan quietly replied. "I have been in prison, too, and know what such thoughts mean. But, there, I must hurry away now to catch my steamer."

The *Banner* was about ready to leave her wharf as Nathan stepped on board. He wished to be by himself, that he might think over all that had happened during the day. He found a secluded spot on the main deck, and there in a corner he seated himself upon a small camp-chair, and leaned back against the wall which separated him from the purser's bedroom.

He had been here but a few minutes when three people, a man and two women, brought their chairs and sat down a short distance away. At first he paid no attention to them, but continued his meditation. At length, happening to glance in their direction, he

straightened suddenly up as he recognized the man as Judge Preston. He looked much older than when he had last seen him on that fateful day when he had committed an innocent man to the Penitentiary. But he seemed to be as overbearing and petulant as ever, and answered curtly whenever the women spoke to him. Nathan noted his fat face, small eyes, and bull-like neck, and a feeling of repulsion swept over him. How often in his lonely cell he had pictured the man in his mind, and vowed vengeance some day. And here he was close at hand, and he could do nothing. The weapon of revenge was in his pocket, but he must not use it. If Ned Preston obeyed the orders he had received, his father would go to the grave without any knowledge of his son's infamy. It did not seem right that the judge should escape. He should be made to suffer, and his haughty pride humiliated. It was hard for Nathan to control himself as these thoughts surged through his mind. Perhaps he was a fool, after all, for the course he had taken. Would it not be better to let the law deal with the guilty one? Even now Ned Preston might elude him, and he recalled Mr. Black's warning. Ned was a judge's son, and the law had many loop-holes for a rogue to escape.

Nathan could not help hearing what the women were talking about. He felt sure that they were the judge's wife and daughter. They were as talkative as the man was silent.

"I am so glad we came by the boat," the elder woman was saying. "Ned wanted to take us in his car, but this is such a change. He has gone to notify Helen of our coming. She will be quite surprised."

"Oh, I guess nothing will surprise her, mother," the other sarcastically replied. "She doesn't take much

interest in us and our affairs. I know she worries Ned a great deal."

"I am afraid so," and Mrs. Preston gave a deep sigh. "Poor Ned looked troubled when we called at his office on our way here. Did you notice it, dear?"

"Yes, mother, he was unusually pale. Perhaps he is annoyed about his name being in the paper this afternoon. Did you see it, papa?" she asked, turning to the judge.

"Yes I did," was the snapping reply.

"And isn't it a shame that Ned's name should be mentioned in connection with that disgraceful affair?"

"It is. Very disgraceful."

"I was speaking to Ned about it," Mrs. Preston remarked, "and he told me that the man who aided that fugitive to escape the Police served a long term in the Penitentiary. Did you know that, John?"

"I did, for I sentenced him."

"You sentenced him!"

"Certainly, and if he'd been before me to-day, I should have sent him up again. He is a dangerous man to be at large. And he's now living in the country near Ned, just think of that!"

"He is!" Miss Preston exclaimed. "Why, I feel afraid already. It isn't safe for Helen to have such a man in the neighborhood. I wonder if she knows about him."

Nathan had heard enough. He rose abruptly to his feet, stepped swiftly past the three, and made his way down to the lower deck. And here he remained, silent and thoughtful, as the steamer plowed on her way. He was on the lookout when they came to the wharf where the Prestons were to land, and he saw Ned there with his car. As they drove away, he thought of Helen,

and pitied her. What chance would she have with those two self-complaisant women? he asked himself. How repellant they must be to her, and how her gentle nature must recoil from their sharp tongues and prying eyes.

Nathan thought of all this as he sat on his verandah that evening after supper. It was good to be back home again. There was a quiet peace surrounding him, and a restful spirit possessed his soul. He wondered how Helen was enduring her visitors, and if she longed to be away from them. There were more prisoners in the world than those behind bars and bolts, he mused. Helen was really a prisoner, he felt sure, even though she lived in a fine house. So was her husband, but in a far different sense. He smiled as he recalled his conversation with Ned, and the despair he had exhibited. And Black, the lawyer, was a prisoner, too. He longed for the free life in the open, but was compelled to remain in the city, most of the time in his office. But he was not like Ned Preston. He looked forth from his place of confinement to the hills, forest, lake and river. Although his body was enslaved, his mind was free and noble. Ned, on the other hand, peered forth angrily and fearfully upon life. His heart was bad, therefore his deeds were evil. There came to Nathan's mind two lines he had learned years ago, and which had often inspired him during those terrible year in the Penitentiary:

> "Two men looked through prison bars,
> The one saw mud, the other saw stars."

"I guess that is very true," Nathan remarked aloud. "I must try to see more of the stars, although it is difficult to keep one's eyes off the mud when there is so much of it around."

He was aroused by the sound of a waggon coming along the road. It stopped in front of the house, and Nathan saw Mr. Westmore alight and walk toward the verandah. He noted that the old man's step was not as brisk as formerly, and that he seemed very tired. He rose to his feet as the clergyman approached.

"Sit down, sir," he invited, offering him a chair.

"I can't stay long," the Parson replied, as he settled down wearily upon the proffered seat. "I have just come from Silas Fletcher's. One of his little children died this afternoon, and I have come to see if you will make the coffin. I have brought the measurements. I hope you will be able to do it."

"Certainly, Mr. Westmore, I shall make it in the morning. But what was the matter with the child?"

"Diphtheria, and a very malignant kind. I am afraid there will be other deaths in the family. Poor Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher are almost heart-broken and completely worn out. They live three miles back from the river, and are vary industrious and respectable people."

"Have they had the doctor?"

"Oh, yes. But he lives a long distance away, so it was too late when he came to do anything for little Bennie. The neighbors are so afraid of the disease that they will not go near the house."

"But you have been there," Nathan reminded. "Were you not afraid?"

"I am different, remember. I must go wherever duty calls. I am going back again just as soon as I get a little rest."

"In the morning, Mr. Westmore?" Nathan inquired.

"Yes. And I shall come this way, so if you have the coffin ready I can take it with me. It will not be large, and I know I can manage it in my waggon."

"When will the funeral take place?"

"To-morrow afternoon, providing you can get the coffin ready."

"It will be ready early in the morning, Mr. Westmore. You can leave that to me."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Stone," and the Parson rose to his feet. "I must go home now. What a comfortable place you have here. I almost envy you such a life. Good night."

Nathan was deeply moved by the words and manner of the old clergyman. How light he made of his own part in helping the stricken Fletchers. But Nathan knew from what he had heard of his deeds in the past, what a great comfort and assistance he always was in times of trouble. Like his Great Master he was ever going about doing good, and all classes were alike to him. To think of the man was an inspiration.

Nathan had never made a coffin, but he knew just what was needed. He lost no time that night in going to the store to obtain the necessary materials. He paid for these, and when he reached home, he went at once into his workshop. He selected several of his choicest boards, and by the lamplight over the bench he worked hour after hour. Not until the last touch had been given to the little coffin, and a rough outside box made, did he lay down his tools. He had completed his work, and could afford to rest.

Nathan was ready when Mr. Westmore arrived, and went with him on his mission of mercy. The Parson objected, saying that it was unnecessary for him to run any risk. But Nathan told him not to worry, that he was only too pleased to be of some assistance.

"I have only myself to consider," he said, "so why

should I not go? And, besides, you will need help at the funeral."

Nathan found Mr. and Mrs. Fetcher quiet, friendly people, and their grief touched his heart.

"Bennie was such a bright boy," Mrs. Fletcher said, "and always so willing to do what he was told. And now he is lying there so still, the poor dear. Just come, Mr. Stone, and have a look at him."

Three other children were sick in bed, so the poor woman was kept very busy. Nathan did what he could to help, for which she was most grateful.

"Why, you are as handy as a woman," she complimented. "Now, some men are no use in the house at all. But you are different."

Nathan noted the quiet dignity of this woman, and her self-restraint. And how brave she was in the face of her great bereavement. Even when the little coffin was borne from the house and laid in the waggon, she made no outcry, but stood in the doorway watching all that was taking place.

"Good by, little Bennie," was all she said, as if the boy were just leaving for school. She remained there while the two teams moved slowly down the highway, and until the trees hid her from view.

Nathan's heart was heavy. Had Mrs. Fletcher made a fuss, or cried out in her distress, it would have been some relief. But to see her standing there without a word was almost more than he could endure. And to think that she had to go back to the care of her other children, not knowing which of them would be the next to be taken from her.

"Mrs. Fletcher is a heroine," he remarked to the Parson.

"Indeed she is, Mr. Stone. I have known her for

years, and she has always been that way. Mrs. Preston thinks she is a wonderful woman, and often visits her. She was so grieved this morning when I told her about Bennie's death."

"Do you mean Mrs. Ned Preston?" Nathan asked.

"Yes, the very one. She is a noble woman, and does so much good in a quiet way. I wish I could say the same about her husband. I cannot understand how she came to marry a man like that."

Nathan made no reply, for the clergyman's words had given him food for much thought. He had no idea before that Helen went to the Fletcher's. But it was just like her, he knew. She had not changed, but was as sympathetic as ever. What steps would she now take to help the stricken family? he wondered. She could not very well go herself, as she had her own two children to consider. Perhaps she would engage the services of a trained nurse. Then he thought of the money Mr. Black said he would deposit in the bank to his credit. Why not use some of that? Yes, he would do it. Impulsively he turned to the clergyman.

"Mrs. Fletcher should have a nurse," he began. "She will break down if she doesn't have a woman's help."

"I am afraid so," Mr. Westmore replied. "But where is the money to come from to pay a nurse? Silas has a hard time to make a living, as it is. He cannot afford any extra expense."

"But I can, sir, and I am willing to furnish the money."

"You!" The Parson stared at his companion in astonishment. "Why, only a short time ago you were very hard up, so you told me. Didn't you have to make chairs and tables for a living?"

"Quite true. But since then I have had a fortune left me, and do not know what to do with it."

Mr. Westmore looked keenly into Nathan's face, as if to see whether he had taken leave of his senses. The latter smiled.

"You needn't doubt my word," he informed him. "What I have told you is true. I have plenty of money now, so if you know of a good nurse, engage her at once, and I shall pay her."

"God bless you!" the clergyman fervently replied. "You have taken a great load from my shoulders. Yes, I know of a nurse at River View. I am sure she will go, and I shall phone to her immediately after the funeral. I prayed very earnestly last night for someone to help poor Mrs. Fletcher, and my prayer has been wonderfully answered."

When they reached the burying ground, the coffin was lifted from the waggon, and lowered into the grave. After the Burial Service had been read by the Parson, Nathan shovelled in the earth. This completed, the three men stood there looking upon the little mound. Tears streamed down the father's cheeks. At length he turned to Nathan.

"Thank you, sir, for your kindness," he simply said. "I shall never forget it. Please let me know how much I owe you."

"You owe me nothing, Mr. Fletcher. I consider it a privilege to be able to help you."

"But the cost! the cost!"

"Everything is paid for, so do not worry."

As Mr. Fletcher stood there, overcome by this unexpected kindness, the Parson laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Come, Silas," he said. "Mr. Stone wants no pay for what he has done. He is a true man of God."

"He is, he is," the grief-stricken man murmured. "The Lord will reward him."

Nathan and the clergyman stood and watched the man as he mounted his now empty waggon and drove slowly away. They made no comment, for words were unnecessary. Their hearts were deeply stirred, and there were tears in their eyes, of which they were not ashamed.

CHAPTER 16

Stricken Down

DURING the remainder of the afternoon Nathan was busy in his workshop. He had chosen with much care a piece of sound wood, and from this he fashioned a little cross, of Celtic design, such as he had seen in pictures. On this he carved with his knife the one word "Bennie," and colored the letters with black paint, which caused them to show up clearly against their white background. After supper he carried the cross down to the burying ground, and placed it at the head of the little grave. He then gathered a number of wild flowers and laid them tenderly over the mound until every portion of the raw earth was hidden from view. A sweet peace reigned in his heart as he did this, all the more satisfying because it was a work of love.

Upon his return to his house, he seated himself upon the verandah and smoked in silent contentment. He thought much about Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher, and the great sorrow that had come into their lives. He also recalled what the Parson had said in reference to Helen. When he thought of her she seemed to be very near, as if her spirit were surrounding him. This had been so in the past, but especially so this evening. He meditated upon it, and wondered if she was thinking of him. He saw her again as he had seen her years ago at the garden gate when he had bidden her good

night. It was the same girlish form he beheld, the flush of health upon her cheeks, and the light of joy and love kindling her eyes. No man had ever loved as he loved Helen, so he believed, and that love was still true and deep, even though she was wedded to another. According to the law of the land she was Ned Preston's wife, but according to a higher law she belonged to Nathan Strong.

And thus he reasoned as he sat gazing out over the river. When Ned came into his mind, he wondered if the fellow had done anything as yet to make restitution for the wrongs he had committed. But he did not wish to think about him now. The death of the child had calmed his agitation, and the thought of Helen had brought peace into his soul. The evening was conducive to such feelings. As the darkness deepened, and the inanimate forms around him grew less and less distinct, he settled comfortably back in his chair, and gave himself up to the enjoyment of it all. The air was balmy and refreshing, with scarcely any wind astir. The stars twinkled overhead, while lights from several houses on the opposite side of the river emitted their feeble rays. Various sounds came through the deepening darkness, such as the bark of a dog, the quack of a wild duck down among the rushes, the occasional cheep of a drowsy bird, or the rumbling of a farm waggon upon the road.

For some time Nathan sat there, thinking deeply. At last he knocked the ashes from his pipe, and was about to go into the house, when a wild cry startled him, and caused him to spring to his feet. It came from his own shore, and he could hear the splashing of water and frantic calls for help. Feeling certain that someone had met with an accident, and was in danger of being

drowned, he hurried down the path, and as he neared the shore he shouted out that he was coming. When he entered the thick bushes it was difficult for him to see, so he was forced to pick his way quite cautiously. The cries had now ceased, and he feared that he was too late.

He had just reached the lower side of the thicket, and had paused to peer keenly out over the water, when a noise at his side startled him. Before he could lift a hand, something struck him upon the forehead, and with a groan he toppled and crashed into the bushes. And as he lay there, the form of a man bent over him, his pockets were quickly searched, and from an inside one a folded paper was drawn forth. With a chuckle of satisfaction, the assailant stepped out upon the path, and hastened up from the shore. Cautiously he approached the house, keeping close to a row of trees by the side of the road. Presently he gave a low whistle, which was immediately answered by a gruff voice. Soon another man appeared, walking unsteadily as if he had been drinking.

"Did you get it, Bill?" he eagerly inquired.

"Y'bet," was the reply. "He went down like a baby. I guess that is what ye want," and he handed forth the paper.

"G-good for you, Bill. I won't forget thish. Here's shomthing for you," and he thrust a roll of bills into the other's hand as he spoke. "Come home wish me, Bill. I'm a bit unshteady on my feet to-night. Here, have a drink; it's good shtuff."

In a few minutes the two were reeling down the road, each trying to hold the other up, and talking in a most maudlin manner.

When Nathan opened his eyes, he did not try to understand what had happened to him. He saw the stars

shining overhead, and watched them curiously. One star larger than the others fascinated him. It was smiling at him, and he tried to smile back. Then it seemed to change, and it was no longer a star but Helen's face. How bright and beautiful she appeared, and he wondered what she was doing away up there. That was a funny place for a woman to be. He called to her, and the sound of his voice startled him. It brought him somewhat to his senses, and for the first time he realised that his head was hurting him. Where was he? What was he doing there in the darkness? He reached out and felt the trees and bushes. Strange that he should be in such a place!

Then all at once his memory returned. He struggled to his feet, and peered through the night. He had been struck on the head as he was on his way to help some one struggling in the water. He found it difficult to stand, he was so dizzy. He groped his way to the path, and there he sank down upon the ground. How his head did hurt! He raised his hand and felt a large lump back of his right ear. Somebody must have hit him. The thought stirred in him a feeling of anger, and aroused him to action. Again he struggled to his feet, and staggered along the path. How far away seemed his house. Could he ever reach it? But still he moved forward, sometimes swaying, but never falling until but a few yards from the verandah. And there he fell, and only with difficulty was he able to drag himself up the steps and into the house.

The world then to Nathan was suddenly turned upside down. He was falling from a fearful height, and hands of demons were waiting to receive him. He struggled and tried to call for help, but words would not come to his lips. He saw Ned Preston and Bill

Tooke jeering at him in his misery. Presently Helen's face appeared. She was holding out her hands, and urging him to come to her. All this faded, and he was once more in the Penitentiary, beating against the door and walls of his cell in a vain effort to escape. And coming to his aid was a little child, with a wonderful halo about its head, and holding in his hands a cross, the very one Nathan had made and placed over the grave. But there was blood upon it now, and it was dripping from above. This puzzled him, but lifting his eyes, he saw two wonderful hands with a deep wound in each from which the blood was trickling. Then a face appeared, such as he had never seen before, so beautiful was it, and with eyes full of compassion. He knew it at once as the face of the Master, and on His head was a crown of thorns. With a cry of intense joy he raised his hands as if to grasp that wonderful form. Instantly the vision faded, and in its stead he beheld the anxious face of Parson Westmore bending over him. He tried to rise, but was too weak.

"Where am I?" he feebly asked. "What has happened?"

"Hush, hush," was the reply. "You are right in your own bed."

"Then another man, a stranger, came to his side, who looked keenly into his face.

"He will be all right now," he heard him say.

"Will he recover, doctor?" the Parson asked.

"I believe so. But he must have very careful attention."

So that strange man was the doctor, Nathan mused. What in the world was he doing there? But so tired was he that he did not ask any questions. The bed was comfortable, and he felt so sleepy. He knew that

a soft light hand was placed upon his forehead, and he heard a woman's voice. He thought it must be Helen's, and he gently whispered her name.

When he again opened his eyes, he felt altogether different. His sleep had refreshed him, and his mind was clearer. He saw a woman sitting near the window, reading. He knew she was a nurse by the dress she wore. She looked somewhat like Helen, although not so beautiful. But what was she doing there in his room? Had he been ill? He remembered that the Parson and the doctor had been by his side when he had aroused from his strange dream. Yes, something must have happened, he felt sure. He made a motion as if to rise, and in an instant the nurse rose to her feet. She saw the light of understanding in his eyes, and smiled.

"Are you feeling better?" she asked.

"I guess so. But, say, I'm almost starved."

Again the nurse smiled, and at once left the room. In a few minutes she returned with some steaming broth.

"Try this," she said, as she dipped the spoon into the dish. "I am going to feed you."

"Do you think I am a baby and must be fed?" Nathan indignantly asked.

"You must be a baby for a while, Mr. Stone, until you get a little more strength. I am merely obeying the doctor's orders."

Nathan was forced to submit and take just as much broth as the nurse would permit. He wished to take an abundance, for he was very hungry.

"Give me something stronger than this," he ordered. "I want a big dinner."

"Then you will have to wait until it is cooked, Mr.

Stone. And, besides, it would not be good for you just now. You have been very ill."

"I believe I have. So you came to nurse me. Who sent you?"

"Mr. Black, the lawyer. He is a personal friend of mine."

"But how did he know I was sick?"

"He saw about your accident in the paper, and brought me up in his car."

"He did! So I met with an accident, did I?"

"Oh, I merely called it that, as no one seems to know just what happened. But, there, you must not talk any more now."

"I must talk," Nathan insisted. "It doesn't hurt me. "Now, tell me, how long have I been in bed?"

"For nearly a week. The doctor was very anxious about you for several days."

"And did you take care of me all that time?"

"I was here, but the neighbors took turns in staying, especially at night. The Parson and Mr. Martin were here a great deal. They would not leave me alone with you. Now, I am not going to talk any more at present. You must go to sleep."

Nathan, however, was not inclined to do as he was told. While the nurse busied herself in the kitchen, he tried to recall the events which led up to his visit to the shore in response to the call for help. But his mind was not very clear, and he was thus thinking when the Parson arrived. The latter took his hand, and his face beamed with pleasure as he looked down upon the patient.

"More like your old self, eh?" he queried. "My! I am glad."

"Yes, I feel better, thanks to you and other kind

friends for what you have done for me. But what happened to me, anyway?"

"That's what we don't know," the clergyman replied, as he sat down by the side of the bed. "Peter Martin found you early one morning lying on the floor, raving at a great rate. He had a hard time with you, but as soon as he could get word to the neighbors, they came and gave a hand. Did you fall and hurt yourself?'

"I know very little about it, Mr. Westmore. I was sitting on the verandah that evening, when I heard a voice calling for help down by the shore. There was a great splashing of water, so I was certain that somebody was in danger of drowning. I hurried down as fast as I could, and when I came near the shore I was suddenly knocked down. How long I remained there I do not know, but have a faint recollection of staggering up to the house. That is all I can remember."

"Strange! very strange!" the clergyman commented. "Are you sure you didn't faint, owing to your hurrying so fast, and falling, struck your head against a stone?"

"I am certain that nothing like that happened. I was struck by some person, for I heard a sound at my side just as the blow fell."

"Dear me! this is all very puzzling," and the Parson rubbed his chin in a thoughtful manner. "I cannot understand it at all. This is a very quiet neighborhood, and we never had such a mysterious thing to happen before. But here comes the nurse, and she will give me a great scolding for keeping you talking. I must hurry away now, so good by for the present."

CHAPTER 17

A Star and a Toad

NATHAN made steady improvement, and in a few days was able to be around again. He had no longer any need of the nurse, so she went back to the city, and once more he was left alone to do his own cooking and housework. He was glad of this, for the presence of the nurse, good and kind though she was, worried him. He was ashamed of his meagre household effects, especially his dishes, which were very few. On the other hand, he missed her, and the place seemed lonely after her departure. He realized now more than ever that it takes a woman to make a house beautiful. He thought of what a home he might now have, with Helen by his side, but for the villainy of Ned Preston and his accomplice, Matthew Halton. And in addition to this he had been treacherously stricken down in the night. What else had Fate in store for him? he wondered, and was he to go on meeting with adventure after adventure to the end of his life? Other men around him did not have such serious experiences, so why should he be continually hounded by forces over which he had no control?

Nathan was anxious to learn if Preston had fulfilled the promises he had made to him that day in the city. He had heard nothing from him, and knew not what he had been doing. He determined to visit Mrs. Watters just as soon as he was able, and he believed that he could

find out something from her. As for Peter Martin, he had said nothing about receiving any money. The time allotted to Preston was now past, and it was evident that nothing had been done in the way of restitution.

He was thinking of this the evening of the day the nurse left, as he was sitting upon the verandah. It was a night similar to the one when he had heard the cry of distress from the river. He had walked about some that afternoon, so felt quite well and strong again. In a day or two he would go to the city and consult Mr. Black, so he planned. He would also find out if Preston had taken any steps to have his miserable houses improved. If not, he would have everything turned over to the lawyer and let him handle the matter.

And as he sat there, Peter Martin limped in from the road, and took a seat by his side. Nathan offered his visitor some tobacco, which was gladly accepted.

"I'm all out of terbaccer," Peter explained, as he filled his well-blackened pipe. "I intended to git some at the store to-day, but fergot all about it. I guess it must have been the condition of Bill Tooke's family that put it out of me mind."

"Why, what's the matter there?" Nathan asked. "Not sick, I hope."

"They're starvin'; that's what's the matter, Mr. Stone. Bill has disappeared, an' no one knows where he has gone. He's been away fer over a week, an' left his family without a scrap of food in the house. The children were over to the store beggin', an' around to the neighbors, too, I guess. It looks as if the parish will have to keep 'em, fer Mrs. Tooke can't manage alone with that brood."

"But has no one seen Bill?" Nathan enquired.

"No, not since the night you met with that accident.

There are some nasty stories goin' around, but I put no credit in 'em. Bill is a bad man, we all know, as fer as stealin' goes, but I never knew of him doin' any real bodily harm sich as happened to you. He's too much of a coward fer that."

"So people think that he was the one who struck me down?"

"Yes, that's what they're sayin', but not openly, ye understand. They're jist whisperin' it, so to speak, fer no one wants to be brought up fer slander. Bill might come back at any time, an' he's jist the man who would like to make trouble. Nuthin' would suit him better than to sue somebody fer damages. He has nuthin' to lose, while we have our farms. That has allus struck me as unfair. Why is it that a man who isn't worth a hill of beans kin trump up a charge against some neighbor, an' put him to no end of trouble an' expense?"

"But he would have to prove his charge, remember," Nathan reminded. "The law will not allow a good citizen to be ruined by such a creature."

"That may be all very well as fer as it goes, Mr. Stone. But think of the trouble, worry, an' expense a good citizen is put to in order to defend himself. He has to hire a lawyer, an' that sometimes means as much as his place is worth. An' supposin' he does win his case, what does he git in return? Nuthin', an' the man who brought in the charge gits scott free, 'cause he ain't worth a cent. No, it ain't fair by a long chalk."

While Peter was thus talking, Nathan was doing some serious thinking. He was rather surprised that people associated Bill Tooke with the deed down by the river. But he himself had thought of it ever since he regained his senses. It was no doubt revenge the man sought. If he had intended to kill him, he would have

finished him on the spot. Then, perhaps, when he found out how serious was the injury, he had become frightened and cleared out. Yes, it did seem reasonable. But did Tooke have any other object in view? Was he Ned Preston's tool? The idea came to him with startling intensity. Ned had a reason for doing away with the man who stood between him and the Penitentiary. But never before did Nathan imagine that he would resort to bodily injury to accomplish his purpose.

"Have you seen Preston lately?" he asked, turning to Peter.

"No, I have not, though I have heard about him. He's been hittin' the booze pretty lively, so I've been told. I do pity that wife of his."

By this Nathan knew that Ned had not fulfilled his promise, and had been drinking hard, no doubt, to drown his despair. But was that the only reason? he asked himself after his neighbor had gone. Did he imagine that he could evade the issue and escape? The only way for him to do that was to obtain possession of Halton's confession. This thought caused Nathan to straighten suddenly up, as a great fear leaped into his mind. Had he obtained it? Was that the cause of the attack? Trembling with excitement, he rose to his feet and went into the house. The coat he had worn that night to the shore was hanging in his bedroom, and he had not used it since the accident. It took him but a minute to reach it, and thrust his right hand into the inside pocket. Then a cry burst from his lips. The paper was gone!

Nathan stood there amazed and dumbfounded. His eyes stared straight before him, and his body was motionless as a statue. At length he groped his way into

the outer room, and sank down into a chair by the writing-table. He understood now the meaning of that attack. Preston wanted the confession, and he had either done the cowardly deed himself, or had hired Bill Tooke to do it. All was clear, and so Ned had won again.

Nathan's weak condition had much to do with the spirit of despair that now settled upon him. He had fought hard, but everything had been against him. He had tried to be true, to face the world bravely, and not whine like a whipped cur. Freedom from the Penitentiary had given him renewed energy, and he had determined to press manfully forward, clear his name, and to be of some use in the world. But all that seemed in vain. The powers of darkness were opposing his steps, and seeking his ruin.

He rose from his chair and paced up and down the room. A deep, raging anger consumed him. Where was the justice of it all? he asked himself. What was the use of being honorable and upright when evil was permitted to triumph? He recalled his years of confinement, suffering for the sin of others who had become prosperous. He thought of his parents, and what they had endured. He looked around and the loneliness of the room swept upon him. Others had their homes, with loved ones near. And what did he have? A house, and nothing more. But his enemy, the man who had done him so great a wrong, had the one woman in all the world he held most dear. Why were such things permitted?

As he moved to and fro, the beast nature within him slipped its leash and ran wild. No longer was Nathan the quiet, self-controlled carpenter, but a brute of the jungle. Devils in forms of human beings were continually pursuing him. He could not escape, so he

would fight, he would tear, he would rend asunder. He would be a law unto himself, for that was his only protection. The law of the land had failed him in the past, and it might do so again. Ned Preston and Bill Tooke had triumphed for a time; they had robbed and injured him. But he would track them down, and have revenge. They had shown no mercy to him, so he would grant none to them. His emotion was intense, and the room seemed unbearably close and oppressive. The walls appeared to be crowding in upon him like menacing arms ready to crush him to death. Anywhere was better than in that silent house. With a moan he fled from the room, out into the night. The air cooled his hot face, and his brain cleared. He was weary from his overmastering excitement, so dropping upon the grass, he lay there in the midst of the dew. The stars twinkled as of old, and sounds of night drifted to his ears. These he hardly noticed for a time, but as his calmness returned, he stretched out his hands to the great vault above. It was a mute appeal for help, a longing for some sustaining power in his hour of agony.

For some time he remained there, fighting the battle he had so often fought before. But he was weak now, and the floodgates of his passion were wide open. He had little strength to contend against the overwhelming torrent. His eyes were turned upward, and as he looked, a star shot across the sky, and then disappeared. He had often seen such a thing before, and had thought very little about it. But now it was different. It impressed him deeply, for that shooting star seemed to him as a sign etched for an instant in a streak of flaming glory by an unseen hand. It sent a thrill of strength through his soul, mingled with a sense of awe. Perhaps it was a message direct to him, he mused. It was

foolish of him, no doubt, to believe such an idea, and yet it brought some comfort to his heart, and soothed the fever within.

Nathan was very still as he watched the heavens and thought of all this. Then something moved in the grass by his side. Almost intuitively he reached out in the darkness, and when his hand touched the body of a toad, he gave a slight gasp of fear, and shrank back. Then he laughed, and the sound of his own voice startled him. But the tension of his severe mental strain was broken, and he felt relieved.

Slowly he rose to his feet and stood silently there in the night. His mind was very active, and he was thinking keenly. The glory and mystery of a flaming star, and the touch of a loathsome toad! What a contrast! Surely these two coming so close together must have a meaning. What was it? Ah, now he grasped the idea. His life was meant to be glorious. He was intended to look up to things high and noble. But he had forgotten, so that vivid star in the sky was a reminder to him of his manhood. And the toad—a repulsive thing of earth—was a warning lest he should lose the majesty within, and become a mean, vile creature from which people would shrink in fear. Such was his interpretation, and it sent the blood coursing through his body. He felt much stronger. No, he would not sink; he would rise. He had been wronged, defeated, but he would win as a man, and not as a beast.

CHAPTER 18

Inspiration

IT was late next morning when Nathan awoke. He was in no hurry to get up, as it was Sunday, and there was really nothing for him to do. He was much refreshed after his sleep, and the brightness of the day brought him renewed courage and strength. The mental storm of the previous night had now given place to a confident peace. He was in a better frame of mind, and when he at last got up, dressed, and went out of doors, life once more appealed to him. All nature was astir. The birds were chirping among the trees, the bees were humming amidst the flowers, and butterflies were zigzaging here and there. The river was unruffled, and the great trees along the shore were mirrored in the placid surface. There was peace everywhere, in keeping with the Day of Rest. It affected Nathan like an elixir, and he drank in great draughts of the invigorating air. He resolved that no matter how he had been treated, he would enjoy this day. Come what might, evil or good, he would not worry about what lay beyond the bend in the road.

He went into the house and prepared his late breakfast. It consisted of a fresh egg, toast and coffee. It was the first meal he really enjoyed since his accident. After he was through, he filled and lighted his pipe, and smoked to his heart's content. A well-worn copy of Emerson's Essays was nearby, for it had been his

habit to read while eating. He opened it now, dipping here and there, and refreshing his mind with passages he had formerly underlined. They brought a thrill to his soul, especially sentences from the essay on Heroism.

"Oh, friend, never strike sail to a fear! Come into port greatly, or sail with God the seas. Not in vain you live, for every passing eye is cheered and refined by the vision . . . I see not any road which a man can walk, but after the counsel of his own bosom. . . . It may calm the apprehension of calamity in the most susceptible hearts to see how quick a bound nature has set to the utmost affliction of malice."

Nathan liked these words and he thought upon them for some time. Last night he was ready to strike sail to fear. But he had been wonderfully strengthened and warned by a sign from heaven, and the toad he had touched. He was well aware that they had not been sent for his special benefit. They had merely happened while his soul was deeply stirred, and he had appropriated them for his good.

Rising at length from the table, he washed his few dishes, and went down to the shore. This was his favorite haunt on fine Sundays, but he had a special reason for going there now. He had a faint hope that Halton's confession might have dropped from his pocket, and that he might find it among the bushes. But although he searched most carefully when he reached the place, it was nowhere to be seen. Certain was he now that it had been stolen, and that Ned Preston had destroyed it long ere this.

Seating himself in a shady spot under a big branching tree, he leaned back against the huge trunk and gave

himself up to the spirit of meditation. It was good to be there, with no one near to disturb him. Of only one person he thought this afternoon, and how gladly he would have welcomed her. In fact, he did look more than once downstream, hoping that Helen might take it into her head to come that way. Of course, he was well aware that if she did appear he would leave the shore so that she might not see him. But it was pleasant to think about her on an afternoon such as this, and wonder what she was doing.

He was startled by the church bell as it rang out its summons to worship. He had forgotten all about the service, and as he had not attended for two Sundays, he decided to go. And besides, he felt the need of the spiritual uplift which he had always received in that little sanctuary of peace.

Nathan knew that this was the half-hour bell, so he waited until the final summons sounded forth ere he left the shore and made his way slowly across the field. He strolled through the grave-yard, stopping for a few seconds to look upon the little mound with the faded flowers and the cross he had erected. He was the last to enter the church, and he slipped quietly into a back seat just as the Parson was giving out the opening hymn. The first person he saw was Helen, seated at the little organ, ready to play in the absence of the regular organist. Here was a treat in store for him which he had not expected. He had not heard her play for years, but how often he had watched her in her old home, seated at the piano, playing some old familiar songs. He had always been charmed then, but never so much as on this bright Sunday afternoon. He thought more of her, and was more intent upon watching her than the words that were

sung. He could see the side of her face quite clearly from where he was sitting, and he thought that she was somewhat pale.

When the hymn was finished, Helen left the organ, and stepped back to where her two children were standing. As she did so, she gave one quick, searching glance down at the congregation, and Nathan was sure that she looked straight at him. His heart beat fast, and a strange thrill of happiness possessed him. Perhaps she had turned to him with the feeling that he would help her. It seemed so to him, anyway, and he longed to know what was passing through her mind.

The service that afternoon seemed especially adapted to Nathan's needs. The hymns were appropriate to his state of mind, and the psalms for the day were of an inspiring nature.

"The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom then shall I be afraid?

"Though an host of men were laid against me, yet shall not my heart be afraid, and though there rose up war against me, yet will I put my trust in Him."

He liked those words, and also the Parson's sermon. It was a simple beautiful address on Temptation, and most helpful. It seemed as if the venerable man knew of Nathan's terrible struggle the evening before, and had prepared his sermon for his special benefit. Among other things, he spoke about the loneliness of temptation, and how it would often come to one in the darkness of night, and in times of deep depression. He referred to the solitude felt by Christ in His trial, in the desert, in Pilate's judgment-hall, and in the garden. He closed his sermon with the words of a noble man:

"You are tried alone—alone you pass into the desert—alone you must bear and conquer in the Agony—alone you must be sifted by the world. . . . The strength that is in a man can only be learnt when he is thrown upon his own resources and left alone. What a man can do in conjunction with others does not test the man. Tell me what he can do alone. . . . It is one thing to rush on to danger with the shouts and sympathy of numbers: it is another thing when the lonely chieftain of the sinking ship sees the last boatful disengage itself, and folds his arms to go down into the majesty of darkness, crushed, but not subdued."

Nathan was intensely interested in these words, and as he passed out of the church after the benediction had been pronounced, they kept running through his mind. He longed to know the author, and he determined to ask the Parson at the first opportunity. Indeed, this came sooner than he expected, for Mr. Westmore called to see him on his way up from the church.

"I am pleased to know that you are getting along so well," the clergyman remarked, as he stepped upon the verandah. "I saw you at church, and you seemed greatly interested in my sermon."

"And so I was," Nathan replied, as he offered his visitor a chair. "It was one of the best sermons I ever heard. And I enjoyed so much your closing quotation. Would you mind telling me the author? I should like to know more about him."

"Oh, that was from a sermon by Robertson, of Brighton, and it was preached over seventy years ago. Robertson is a great favorite of mine, and I most always carry one of his books with me. I have a copy in my grip now, so shall be delighted to let you have it."

The Parson went out to his waggon, and shortly returned, holding in his hand a small volume.

"This is it," he began, "and you will notice how worn it is. I like to dip into this when I have a few minutes alone, and always get something new and inspiring. Robertson was a remarkable man, saintly, and a true scholar. He committed to memory the whole of the New Testament, both in English and in Greek, just think of that! I must not tire you, however, with a long account of the man. But read 'The Loneliness of Christ,' from which I quoted to-day. Mrs. Preston is very fond of it, and knows most of it by heart. How her face brightened this afternoon when she heard those words so familiar to her. She is an exceptional woman. I supposed you noticed how well she played at the service. The organ became an instrument of wonderful power under her skillful touch.

"I was greatly impressed by Mrs. Preston's playing," Nathan replied. "She seems to be very attentive to her religious duties."

"Indeed she is. But she does not stop there, for she puts her religion into practice. You would be surprised if I told you all the things she has done for the Fletchers. When she learned of their affliction, she was bound to go right out to the house and help them. But I induced her not to do so on account of her own children. She saw the wisdom of my advice, so sent food and clothing instead. She takes an interest in everyone in trouble. Why, when you were lying unconscious, she came to my house several times a day to inquire about you. She asked no end of questions about your house, and if you were comfortable. She knows as much about you as I do. She is certainly

a woman very much out of the ordinary. But there, I have stayed too long, so must get on my way. Keep that book as long as you like, and when you have read it, I shall gladly let you have another."

Toward evening the weather changed, and the wind drifted in from the south. The sky became overcast, and Nathan knew that rain was not far off. He sat that night by his writing-table, reading the book the Parson had left. The more he read, the more he enjoyed it, for he found it a wonderful treasure house, filled with good things. Several of the noblest passages he committed to memery. At times he would place the book upon the table and meditate upon what the Parson had told him about Helen, and how fond she was of Robertson's sermons. He wondered if she enjoyed them as much as he did, and which portions appealed to her most of all. What bliss it would be to have her with him, seated by his side, doing some fancy-work, perhaps, while he read aloud. He had often pictured just such a scene, and it was always evening. What a difference between his bright dream and the dreary reality.

He recalled again the glance Helen had given him at church that afternoon, and what the Parson had said about her interest in him. Did she know who he really was? Perhaps she did, and her love might have been increasing during the years of her sad married life. It gave him comfort to feel that such was the case, and although she could never legally belong to him, he believed that he was much in her mind, and that she still loved him.

He was thus thinking, when he heard footsteps upon the verandah, and then a timid knock sounded upon the door. Wondering who it could be, he rose quickly to

his feet, threw open the door, and looked out. A slight exclamation of surprise escaped his lips, and his eyes brightened with joy, for standing before him he beheld the white face and trembling form of Helen Preston!

CHAPTER 19

The Night Visitor

"ARE you Nathan Strong?" the woman asked in a low voice.

"Why, certainly," was the astonished reply. "Have you any doubt about it?"

"No, no, only I wanted to be absolutely sure, and to hear it from your own lips. Oh, I shouldn't be here!" and she glanced nervously around.

"Do not be afraid," Nathan assured. "Come inside; it will be safer there."

He offered her a chair near the table, then turned and closed the door. He also drew down the blind of the one window to the room. He then came and stood by her side.

"There, that is better," he remarked. "No one can see us now."

"Oh, I am so glad, Mr. Strong, but——"

"Don't call me that," Nathan interrupted. "I am not 'Mr. Strong' to you."

"I know it," and the woman's head bent a little, while a slight flush appeared upon her cheeks. "But it was so long ago I called you 'Nathan' that I thought you might consider it strange if I did so now."

"Years have made no difference in my feelings toward you," Nathan quietly replied. "You are still 'Helen' to me, and always will be. Let me be 'Nathan' to you just for to-night, at least."

For a few seconds there was silence in the room. Then Helen gave a slight nervous laugh, and again glanced anxiously around.

"You wonder, no doubt, why I am here," she began. "But I have something which I believe belongs to you. Here it is," and she handed him a paper which she had drawn forth from under the rain-coat she was wearing.

Nathan took it in his hand, noting, as he did so, that it was scorched as with fire. He unfolded it, and his eyes at once brightened with joy. It was the missing confession!

"Helen! Helen! Where did you get this?" he demanded.

"Oh, I hardly dare tell you," she replied. "I am afraid, terribly afraid."

"You need not fear, Helen. I shall do nothing that will harm you in the least degree."

"I am not afraid of you, Nathan, but of Ned. If he should ever know that I gave you that paper he would kill me, I feel certain."

"No he won't. And, besides, he will never find out from me, so you need not worry. Did Ned steal this?"

"I cannot say for sure. I only know that he came home drunk the night you were hurt, and I was sitting alone before the fire, which was very low. He was in a wretched condition, and could hardly stand. He went at once to the fire-place and threw in that paper. He then dropped upon the floor, and there he lay, talking in a wild manner about how he had outwitted his enemy. Thinking that the paper was of some special importance, and that Ned did not realise what he was

doing, I managed to rescue it. I read it that night after Ned was in bed, and, oh!——"

She ceased abruptly, and her agitated manner, and the strained expression upon her face, told of the agony she was undergoing. Nathan felt sorry for her, although he said nothing.

"You can imagine what a shock I received," she continued. "I knew that Ned was doing what was wrong, but never for an instant had I ever suspected him of such a cowardly deed as that. I was almost wild with grief and despair, and then when I heard what had happened to you, I thought I should go out of my mind. I was certain that Ned had done it in order to get that paper, and if you died he would be hung."

"It's a wonder you didn't destroy this," Nathan replied, motioning to the paper. There was a note of bitterness in his voice, for he believed that Helen had only been concerned about him for Ned's sake.

"I was tempted to destroy it," the woman confessed. "I thought of my children, and what a terrible disgrace it would be should their father be put in the Penitentiary, or—or hung. Anything but that, I reasoned. On several occasions I was on the point of destroying that paper, but each time I resisted the temptation."

"Why?" Nathan asked. "It seems strange that you didn't do so. It would have protected your husband, yourself, and your children, would it not?"

"Perhaps so, but it would not have been just to an innocent man."

"So you included me in your thoughts, I see."

"Certainly I did, especially when I found out how shamefully you had been treated. And, besides, I learned something else about you."

"What was that?"

"Your remarkable generosity and forbearance in connection with my husband. When you received Matthew Halton's confession, you might have taken immediate action against Ned, or, at least, exposed him to the world. You did nothing of the kind, however, but kept silent. A man who can do such a thing as that is far above the ordinary, so it seems to me."

"How did you find that out?" Nathan asked in surprise.

"Oh, I merely surmised it. You had the confession but made no use of it."

"I am afraid that generosity and forbearance toward Ned had nothing to do with it, Helen. I did use it upon him, and it was partly for your sake."

"You did! For my sake!"

"That was the principal reason. My regard for you has never changed, and I love you as much now, and perhaps more, than I did years ago. No doubt you have forgotten all about the past, but I have not, and never shall. Yes, I did it that you might not suffer."

Nathan took several rapid turns up and down the room, and again came to her side.

"You know the reason now, Helen, and I am not ashamed to tell you. I wished to shield you and your little ones, for I know what a noble woman you are. How many in your situation would have brought such a paper as this to me? Why, they would have destroyed it at once."

"That was what I was tempted to do, as I have already told you," Helen replied. "Even last night I was wavering, but when I heard that sermon this afternoon on Temptation, I was undecided no longer. It thrilled me, especially the quotation about the 'lonely

chieftain of the sinking ship' standing bravely at his post of duty, and with folded arms going 'down into the majesty of death, crushed, but not subdued.' Why, I felt ashamed of myself for my cowardice, and waited impatiently for night to come that I might restore that confession to you."

Helen spoke rapidly, and her face was lighted with a glory such as Nathan had never seen there before. He knew that she was a woman who, like the 'lonely chieftain of the sinking ship,' would go down to death rather than do a dishonest or an ignoble thing. He loved her more than ever for her courageous spirit, although he could not tell her so. And this was the woman united to such a man as Ned Preston! He turned abruptly to the door, opened it, and looked out. It was very dark, and the rain was now falling. Helen mistook his action, thinking that he considered her weak and foolish.

"I hope you do not misunderstand me," she said. "I have tried to do what was right, but God alone knows how hard it was."

"I understand you, perhaps more than you imagine," Nathan replied, as he closed the door and returned to her side. "I know that you are a true woman, one of the noblest. I only wish that I could do something to help you. But what can I do except save you from more trouble?"

"And you will not take action against Ned?" Helen eagerly asked.

"Not if he does what I want him to do. I have demanded that he make as full restitution as possible for a number of wrongs he has committed. So far, he has not complied with my request."

"But how can he do that? Can he ever make restitution for the injury he has done you?"

"I am not thinking of myself, Helen, but of others. I have asked Ned to pay Peter Martin what he owes him; to return to Mrs. Watters the money he cheated from her husband, and to improve his wretched tenement houses in the city. And more than that, and of greater importance to me, he is to give up his evil manner of living and to treat you as a husband should."

"Oh!" Helen's startled exclamation, and her rigidly clasped hands plainly told of her great agitation. Her tear-dimmed eyes were turned upon Nathan's face. "You ordered him to do that!" she gasped.

"I certainly did, and gave him just seven days in which to do it. But so far, he has done nothing."

"My mind is now clear about something that was puzzling me," Helen replied. "I could not understand how Ned knew you had that paper. He never said a word to me about it."

"Does he as a rule talk to you about his affairs?"

"No, he never does. But it is a wonder he didn't say something when he had been drinking heavily. That is the time I learn some of the secrets he always tries to keep from me."

"It's strange that he never told about stealing those bonds."

"No, he never breathed a word about that, and he has never mentioned your name to me since we were married, so far as I can remember."

"And good reason, too. He caused me to go to the Penitentiary, and stole you from me. I wish to speak to you plainly now, Helen, for we are merely friends, and can be nothing more. But the man who

is your husband injured me more in taking you from me than in any other way. I could have borne the unjust imprisonment patiently if I had known that when I was free you would be mine. But when your letters to me ceased, and someone sent that article about your wedding, I lost hope, and longed to end my miserable existence. I had always clung to the idea that you believed me innocent until then."

"But why did you write me that letter saying you were guilty?" Helen asked in astonishment.

"What letter?"

"The one I received from you, in which you said that you had stolen those bonds, and that I was not to write to you any more."

Helen was looking straight into Nathan's eyes as she uttered these words. But she was unprepared for the sudden transformation which swept over his face, and the terrible expression which leaped into his eyes. She shrank instinctively back, and lifted her hand as if for protection. Nathan, however, seemed not to notice this, but grasped her by the arm, his whole body trembling violently.

"Helen! Helen! are you telling me the truth?" he asked in a voice that was little more than a hoarse whisper. "Surely you didn't get a letter like that —and from me! Impossible!"

"But I did, Nathan, and it was on the same kind of paper you always used when writing from the Penitentiary, and the writing was like yours. You must have written it."

Slowly Nathan's hand moved from the woman's arm and dropped to his side. His slightly-bent shoulders straightened until he was standing erect as a statue. The blood surged wildly through his veins,

although outwardly he appeared unusually calm. But it was the calmness of a man who through many trials and much injustice had become master of himself. His eyes, which had been staring hard before him, turned to Helen's uplifted, tear-stained face. A great longing swept upon him to stoop and enfold this unhappy woman in his arms, urge her to leave her wretch of a husband, and flee with him to the remotest part of the world. He could use Halton's money, and with it make amends for the wrongs he and Ned Preston had committed. The next instant he had banished this temptation, as unworthy of himself and the woman he loved. No, he would not run away, but fight through like a man.

"Helen, I did not write that letter," he at length found voice to say. "I know nothing about it."

The woman looked at him as if she had not heard aright. She tried to speak, but words would not come. With a cry of despair, she bowed her head upon the table and sobbed most pitifully. Nathan made no attempt to soothe her, but stood silently by her side. When the flood of grief had at last spent itself, he laid his right hand gently upon her shoulder.

"That letter ruined both our lives, Helen. Can you not surmise who wrote it and forged my name?"

"Oh, I have no doubt who it was," the woman replied, as she raised her head and looked again into Nathan's face. "I need no one to tell me that. But what villainy! What treachery!"

She sprang to her feet, her eyes ablaze with anger. She stood there, lithe and supple, her graceful form perfectly erect. The change was startling. The quiet, confiding woman had been suddenly transformed. She had patiently endured and suffered for

years, but this new revelation of the baseness of the man she called "husband" was the breaking-point.

"I must go now," she declared, "but I go a different woman from the one I was when I entered this house. Oh, Nathan, if I had only known!"

"I understand, Helen. It would have meant so much to us both. But now it is too late."

"Yes, yes, too late!"

She sighed, and held out her hand.

Good-night, Nathan," she simply said. "I must go now."

"Not alone along that dark road, Helen. I am going with you."

"You must not. You are not strong. I am not afraid of anything to-night. I need the darkness, for it will cover my grief."

Nathan, however, paid no heed to her words, but turning, he put on his rain-coat and hat. Seeing that he was determined to accompany her, Helen made no further protest. Together they passed out of the house and along the dark, silent road. Neither spoke, but walking side by side, each was sustained by the other's presence. At last Helen stopped.

"This is far enough, Nathan," she told him. "I can see the light ahead. Good-night, and may God bless you."

Impulsively the man reached out, found her hand, and raised it to his lips. Then they separated, one to go back to his lonely house, the other on to a life from which all joy and hope had fled.

CHAPTER 20

A Desperate Attempt

NATHAN was in a most thoughtful mood as he walked home that night. He was not really unhappy, for the thought of Helen's visit filled his soul with an indefinable joy. That she had come to him at last after long years of separation, and had talked with him, meant much to the lonely man. The new revelation of Preston's baseness stirred him deeply, but he thought less of him now than he did of Helen. He well knew that Ned was capable of any degree of infamy. This was but another in the long chain of evil deeds he had been forging, and for which he would have to answer when the time came. With Halton's confession once more secure, Nathan felt himself again master of his adversary.

Reaching at length his house, he entered, and the first thing that met his eyes was something white lying upon the floor near the table. He picked it up, and knew it instantly as Helen's handkerchief, which she had evidently dropped in her excitement. It was but a small, fragile thing of silk, delicately embroidered, and in one corner there was the single letter "H." But it meant much to him. It belonged to her who was dearer to him than life. She had held it in her hands, and with it she had wiped away the tears from her eyes. Impulsively he pressed it to his

lips, but the next instant his hand dropped, and he glanced guiltily around.

"What a fool I am," he growled. "I must stop this nonsense. What right have I to be doing such a thing? Helen is another man's wife, and here I am kissing her handkerchief."

Picking up the lamp, he went into the kitchen and lifted down from the shelf the little box which contained his precious treasures. He carried it to the table, opened it, and looked in. There was the five-cent piece the bright-faced lad had given him weeks before. He had forgotten all about it, but now he lifted it out and held it in his hand. The memory of the day he had received it came back to him, and the thrill that had stirred his heart by the child's manly action. Carefully he wrapped the coin up in the silk handkerchief, and dropped the little package into the box. When he had replaced the latter upon the shelf he went back into the other room, and sat there for some time in deep thought. A strange new glory seemed to pervade the place, especially the table upon which Helen had bowed her head. It was the transforming power of love in the heart of the silent man which made the difference.

Nathan went to the city in the morning on the early boat. He had slept well, so was in good form for the trying work he knew that lay ahead that day. His main object was to meet Ned Preston, and ascertain what he intended to do. There would be no further delay, Nathan was determined about that. He had Ned once again in his control, and he would not loosen his grip until he had obeyed him to the letter.

Upon reaching the city, he went immediately to Preston's office, but he was not there. In fact, he

would not arrive for another hour, so the young woman in attendance informed him. Mr. Preston had phoned from his country place that he was unexpectedly detained that morning. Rather than wait, Nathan decided to go to see Mrs. Stairs. He had been anxious to learn how she was getting along, and what had become of her husband. He was surprised to find them both at home, looking quite happy. They gave him a hearty greeting, and explained all that had recently taken place.

"Through the kindness of many friends I am out on parole," Henry told him. "In a few days I hope to be able to work, and Mr. Black has obtained a position for me. I can never repay that man for his great kindness."

"Neither can we repay you, Mr. Strong, for what you have done for us," Mrs. Stairs added. "But for you, Henry would have died by the side of the road. I am certain of that."

When Nathan left the house an hour later, his heart was filled with thankfulness. He felt satisfied that the Stairs would get along very well now, and that they would not be in dire need again. He intended to keep them under his special care, for he believed they were people worthy of much consideration.

Preston had just arrived as Nathan once again entered the office, and he was standing talking sharply to his stenographer. As he turned and saw Nathan, he stared hard at him for a few seconds. He seemed upon the point of saying something, but instead, he motioned to his inner office.

"What are you doing here?" he sternly asked, after he had closed the door, walked over to his desk, and sat down.

"To see you, of course," Nathan replied. "What else would bring me?"

"H'm, is that so? I should think you'd be ashamed to come after what you did to my wife."

"Do to your wife! Why, what do you mean?"

"Oh, you know, all right. Filled her mind with all sorts of nonsense, and turned her against me. She raised hell this morning, and that's what kept me late."

"Following your example, is she? But she can never show such a devilish crop as you can boast of, Ned. You evidently disliked a dose of your own stuff. What did she tell you?"

"Oh, nothing much; just a few words. But, Lord! they cut like a knife, and the way she looked at me with those wonderful eyes of hers! I can't get it out of my mind. And it's all your doings."

"Perhaps so, Ned, but whose fault is it, after all? Didn't you bring it upon yourself? You know what your life has been, so why are you surprised when your wife has learned something more of your baseness. But I didn't enlighten her."

"You didn't! How did she find out, then?"

"You will have to ask her yourself. But I am not here to talk about this. I want to know why you have not obeyed my orders?"

"Orders! Your orders mean nothing to me. I'm not your slave."

"You seemed to think you were the last time I was with you in this office. Have you forgotten that?"

"Not at all. But things have changed since then. If you happen to have Halton's confession with you, please read it."

Nathan noted the expression of triumph upon Pres-

ton's face, and the sneering smile that lurked around the corners of his mouth. But when he had brought forth the paper, and held it up, there was a startling change. Preston's eyes grew big with astonishment, and his hands trembled.

"W-where did you get it?" he gasped.

"Get it!" Nathan repeated. "Why do you ask that? You knew very well that I had it."

"Yes, yes, but I thought—I thought——"

"Your thinking didn't do any good, Ned, so don't try so hard again. It might get you into more trouble. I am not going to ask you how you got this paper from me the night I was stricken down on my own shore. Neither am I going to tell you how I happen to have it now. But here it is, and if you don't obey my orders at once, I shall take immediate action. There will be no further delay this time, remember."

Preston was looking keenly at the document, and he noticed that the edges were somewhat singed. He then stared hard at Nathan.

"Are you a man or a devil?" he asked in a hoarse voice. "I burned that paper in the grate, and here you have it with you."

"And so you acknowledge the deed, eh, Ned? Well, that is interesting. But look here, you'll find me to be a devil, all right, if you don't do as I order. I want you to answer at once. Are you going to obey me, or are you not?"

"What is it you want me to do, Nathan? I guess I've forgotten."

"H'm, your memory must be very poor, Ned. Anyway, I shall soon tell you. You must pay Peter Martin what you owe him, and also Mrs. Watters, the widow, whose husband you robbed, and broke his

heart. Settle with these two first of all, and we can attend to the other matters afterwards."

"But this is a regular hold-up," Preston declared. "It's disgraceful!"

"You didn't seem to think so when you cheated them. You considered it shrewd business, no doubt, when you had them in your clutches. Perhaps you will see differently now."

"I shan't pay them," Preston vehemently cried. "Five thousand dollars! Why, it's outrageous! They can go to the devil for all I care, and you, too."

"Very well, then, Ned; if that is your decision, it's no use for me to waste any more time. You have had fair warning, and I have been more lenient to you than you deserve. Mr. Black can attend to you now."

Nathan turned and was moving toward the door, when Preston called him back.

"Don't be in such a hurry, Nathan," he cried. "This is a comtemptible piece of business, and I'd like to skin you alive. But you've got me in a fix, and I can't help myself. It would not do for this to get abroad. And, besides, it would kill my father and mother. Yes, I might as well pay up, and get the whole d—— business settled. Will you deliver the cheques if I make them out?"

"Certainly," Nathan replied, returning to the desk. "I shall leave them with Mrs. Watters and Mr. Martin this evening."

Preston pulled open a drawer of his desk, as if to get his cheque book. Swiftly his right hand was thrust in, and the next instant Nathan was staring into the muzzle of a levelled revolver.

"Ah, I guess that'll bring you to your senses quicker than anything else," Preston remarked. "Now hand

over that confession, and no fooling about it, either. If you don't I'll shoot you as I would a dog. Hurry up and get a hustle on."

Nathan looked steadily at the infuriated man, and realized that what he threatened he would do. He noticed, however, that the hand holding the weapon trembled, and that it would take but little to divert the aim. A sudden idea flashed into his mind, so thrusting his hand into his pocket, he brought forth the coveted paper.

"Ah, I knew that would fetch it," Preston sneered, as he eagerly reached out his left hand. "Your little game didn't work after all, did it?"

Nathan's only reply was to thrust the confession across the desk, and as he did so, his hand struck the revolver a slashing blow, which knocked it out of Preston's nervous hand. He then leaped forward, seized Ned's wrists, and forced him back into the chair from which he had attempted to rise. A fierce but brief struggle at once ensued, for the baffled man was no match for the powerful form bending over him. In a few minutes Preston was forced to give up. He sat very still, panting heavily from his exertions. Nathan then picked up the revolver from the floor, extracted the cartridges, and placed the weapon in his pocket.

"It's better there," he calmly remarked. "A coward such as you are, Ned, should never handle such a thing as that. Now, what have you to say for yourself? Nothing? Well, perhaps silence is better. But let me tell you this, if some men were in my place, they would crush every bone in your body. Why, I am surprised at my own self-restraint, considering the way you have treated me."

He stood near the desk intently watching the cowering man before him. Presently Preston looked up, and a quiver shook his frame. He stared for a few seconds at Nathan, and all at once the enormity of the crime he had almost committed rushed upon him like a flood. He buried his face in his hands, as if to hide some terrible vision that had come before him. He raised his head, and struggled to his feet.

"Nathan! Nathan!" he cried. "Heavens, I might have done it! Oh! oh!"

"You intended to do so, didn't you, Ned?"

"I did! Before God, I did! You saved me from murder!"

He raised his right hand to his face, and staggered back a step. Nathan knew that the man was terribly in earnest, and that an overwhelming fear possessed him.

"How could you do it, Nathan?" he hoarsely asked.

"Do what?"

"Be strong and patient, while I have been acting the fool? Some men would have killed me."

"I know it, Ned. But never mind about that now. Make out those cheques, and be quick about it."

"Ah, yes, the cheques," and Preston sank down into his chair. "I shall do it at once, and get it ended."

He picked up his cheque book and fountain pen, but his hand trembled so much that he could hardly write. Several times he was forced to stop. But at last the work was completed, and the cheques handed to Nathan, who examined them most carefully.

"This will do for to-day, Ned," he told him. "But get busy and attend to those tenement houses of yours. Remember, also, what I told you about Helen."

Before Preston could reply, the telephone rang.

Indifferently he lifted the receiver, and as he listened, his face grew as white as death. He tried to say something, but words would not come to his lips. He hurriedly replaced the receiver, and rose to his feet.

"My father is very ill; dying!" he announced. "Heart trouble. O Lord! haven't I endured enough for to-day. My father dying! My father dying!"

He seized his hat, rushed across the room, and tore open the door. Nathan slowly followed, after he had carefully placed the cheques and the confession safely away in one of his pockets.

CHAPTER 21

Repairing Things

VERY glad indeed was Nathan to be back home again, and able to settle down to steady work. The excitement of the past weeks had disturbed him very much, and he desired quietness and rest. His own house was a more pleasant abode, after all, with the open spaces surrounding it, the friendly sentinel trees, and the pure invigorating air. Here a man could be renewed in mind and body, and do his work most effectively. The city did not appeal to him. There was too much confusion of competition, the mad rush after excitement and the newest fads, with little chance for the soul to expand and develop. He had truly learned that the real kingdom of God is within one's self, and lacking that, all the glitter and outward trappings of the world will not give him complete contentment. Hence, his thoughts, his work, and his books, occupied all his waking hours.

He rejoiced over the happiness that had come to Mrs. Watters and Peter Martin upon the receipt of the cheques. The tears of joy that glistened in the eyes of the widow, and her quiet expression of gratitude, were reward enough. She was not a woman given to effusion, for years of struggle and sorrow had deepened the self-restraint in her naturally reserved nature. With Peter Martin it was different. As he held the cheque in his hand, and learned whence it had come, he was

greatly moved and sobbed like a child, so much did it mean to him.

"This brings new life to me," he at length found voice to say. "I never expected any justice from Ned Preston, so why he has done it now is more'n I kin understand. Two thousand dollars! Why, it's a fortune to me."

He accompanied Nathan to the road and, ere turning back, he seized his neighbor's hand and held it for a few seconds in a firm grip.

"God bless ye, sir," he fervently said. "You had an important part in gittin' that money, I feel sure, fer Ned Preston would never have done it of his own free will. I kin never repay ye."

Nathan thought of all this as he sat alone that night in his house. How much better it was to force Preston to make some restitution for his evil deeds than to thrust him behind prison bars. He recalled the man's agony in the office, and wondered whether it would change his manner of life, and how his father's sudden death would affect him. So far he had compelled Ned to obey him, but he wished to make him do more than that. It was his desire now that he should turn from the errors of his ways, live the right life, and be a faithful husband to Helen. If he would do that, Nathan could then overlook his injury to him in the past. It would be far better, and it would give him greater satisfaction than to seek mere brute revenge. And unless Ned's conscience was completely seared, this after all might be the most effective revenge, when the guilty one would cry like the unhappy king of old,

> "My conscience has a thousand several tongues,
> And every tongue brings in a several tale,
> And every tale condemns me for a villain."

Nathan hoped that such might be the case with Preston. He wanted him to suffer, but from the suffering to emerge purified and changed. It would be very hard, he well knew, to crush back the feeling of joy should he learn that Ned was enduring the torments of the damned. But he would endeavor, at any rate, to resist the temptation and to prove himself a man of strength. If he could do that, it would be a royal revenge as set forth by the life and teaching of the Master of Galilee.

Following swiftly upon this train of thought came a vision of Helen that night she had visited him. He beheld again her white face turned appealingly to his, and her dark, wonderful eyes, tear-gemmed and fearful. He saw the grace of her white hand as it rested upon the partly-opened door, and her shapely head, crowned with a wealth of black hair, bending so pathetically over the table. She had needed him that night, and she needed him now. But should Ned become a changed man, what would be the result? Would Helen be satisfied? Would she ever think of Nathan Strong, or again seek his assistance? Perhaps not. Yet he had the feeling that her heart belonged to him, even though she was the wife of another. Why should he desire, then, the reformation of the man Helen did not love, and never could love? Should he not wish that Ned might continue in his old way if it would mean the drawing of Helen nearer to him? This was the great temptation which beset the lonely man, and fierce was the struggle before the victory was won. But win he did, and came forth from the conflict stronger than ever. The strength of the vanquished enemy had entered into his own soul, and with it came a new power and a comforting peace.

Nathan had a keen desire to continue his carpentering work, so the next day he turned over in his mind what he should do. He longed to be once more building and repairing. He did not wish to do it now for money, but for the joy of the doing, and not for those who were well able to pay, but for the ones who could not. He had no intention of going elsewhere, but to seek opportunities in his own neighborhood. He felt that there must be such work he could do, if only he could find out where it was.

It is an established law of nature that every desire has somewhere its fulfillment. Nathan found this to be true in his case when the Parson called that afternoon. They were seated upon the verandah, and the visitor was talking about the church, the graceful spire of which could be seen in the distance among the tree tops.

"We hope to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the building of that church next year," Mr. Westmore announced. "But before that takes place many things will have to be done upon it. I am almost ashamed when strangers come to the services. The roof is leaking in several places, the seats need repairing, and nearly all of the book-racks are gone. I hardly dare think of other improvements, but if my people will only attend to those three I shall be most grateful. They are willing enough, but, poor souls, they have little spare time and not much money. I wish that I didn't have to take a cent from them, but could give my services free. That has been my great longing ever since I entered the ministry."

The Parson sighed, and his usually jovial face became grave and thoughtful as he gazed over at the church. Nathan then knew that his desire was about

to be fulfilled. Here was a work he could do for the love and joy of it. Briefly he explained his idea, and requested permission to go ahead.

"This is most unexpected, Mr. Stone," the clergyman declared. "Why, I never for a moment imagined such a thing. I hope you do not think that I was hinting at this when I referred to the condition of the church. Your doing it never once entered my mind."

"I know it," and Nathan smiled at the worthy man's concern. "All the hinting in the world could not induce me to undertake such a work. It was prompted by a deeper and a truer spirit. But if you agree to my proposal, suppose we go to the church now and look it over."

And thus it came to pass that Nathan found a work to do that was dear to his heart and gave him no little pleasure. Peter Martin gladly gave his time in hauling boards and shingles for which he would accept no payment. He wished to assist in shingling the roof, but Nathan objected.

"You have your own place to look after, Mr. Martin," he reminded, "so let me attend to the House of God. I have nothing else to do, so it will keep me out of mischief."

The news of what Nathan was doing soon spread throughout the parish. The quiet carpenter was the subject of numerous conversations, and he was steadily winning the approval of all, although he still remained a mystery to the people. They had heard about the cheques he had obtained from Preston for Peter Martin and Mrs. Watters, of his kindness to the Fletchers, and now this additional work of repairing the church. They had not forgotten the attack that had been made upon him at his own shore, and still associated Bill

Tooke with the deed. Although the latter had sneaked back, and pretended that he had been away on a visit to some relatives, no one believed him. He was not long in learning that all looked upon him with suspicion, which made his lot harder than ever. He hated Nathan, and as the carpenter increased in favor, so much the more he decreased. This was not at all to Bill's liking, so he turned over in his mind how he might seek revenge upon the man he considered his enemy.

Knowing nothing of the stir he was causing in the community, Nathan went steadily on with his work. The days were fine, so he made excellent progress. The Parson was a daily visitor to the church, and his heart was full of gratitude as he observed what was being done. It seemed almost too good to be true that his fond hopes were at last being realised.

One evening after he had eaten his supper, Nathan had occasion to go over to the church. He was working in his shop upon the book-racks, and he needed a small plane he had been using that afternoon while shingling the roof. As he drew near the church, he was surprised to hear the sound of the organ. The door was open, and the music was welling forth upon the still air. He knew the tune, for it was one of his favorites, "Lead, Kindly Light," and the unknown organist was playing with considerable expression. Wondering who it could be, Nathan stepped softly to the door and looked in. To his great surprise he saw Helen sitting there, her face upturned to the east window, and her eyes fixed upon the figure of The Good Shepherd, leading His sheep, and tenderly holding a little lamb in His arms. Nathan had often admired this window, which had been placed there in memory of a former rector of the parish.

It was only a minute that Nathan stood at the door watching the woman at the organ. He wished to remain longer, in fact, speak to her. But he did not wish her to think that he had been prying upon her, so he decided to get the plane and go back to his house.

He had just turned, and was casting one more lingering glance upon the fair face, when the music abruptly ceased, and Helen turned quickly around. Before Nathan could escape, she had caught sight of him, so leaving the organ she came down the middle aisle. Nathan stepped forward to meet her, and as she held out her hand, he noted the expression of pleasure in her eyes.

"I caught you just in time, didn't I?" she began.

"You certainly did, Helen. But please excuse me for being here," Nathan apologized. "I came over for my plane, and hearing the sound of the organ, I was naturally curious to find out who was the musician, never for a moment expecting that it was you."

"I used to come here several times a week," Helen replied. "But lately I have been too lazy. I like this place, it is so quiet and comforting, while that east window is an inspiration. I think you understand what I mean."

"Indeed I do, Helen. I have come down from the roof more than once on purpose to rest a while in here. That window appeals to me, too. We all feel the need of The Good Shepherd, do we not?"

"I know that I do, Nathan, especially so now when my troubles are so heavy. You have heard about Ned, I suppose?"

"Nothing recently. What is he up to now?"

"Acting worse than ever. Oh, he is terrible! He has been drinking hard and acting in such a strange

manner. When he is not drinking, he is so restless. The children annoy him when he is at home, and once when I was playing on the piano he rushed from the house and did not return until late at night. His face has been so haggard that it is startling."

"Perhaps his father's sudden death is troubling him," Nathan suggested. "He thought a great deal of him, so I understand."

"No, it cannot be altogether that. It must be something else, but just what it is I cannot make out. He came home this afternoon, and paced for hours, so it seemed to me, up and down his room. He ate hardly any supper, and left shortly afterwards in the car. I have been so worried for days, and this evening I felt I could not endure the strain much longer. For relief, I went out upon the river, and my boat seemed to head this way of its own accord. Perhaps it was The Good Shepherd leading me to this House of Rest. I have that feeling, anyway, and it gives me much comfort."

"I think I understand," Nathan replied. "I have experienced the same thing myself. How I wish that Ned could do so, too. What a difference it would make to him and to you."

"I am afraid he never will, Nathan. He is very much opposed to churches, and to everything connected with religion. I would not like to tell you what he said when he heard that you were repairing this building, and doing it without any charge."

"You needn't tell me, Helen, as I can form a pretty good idea what he would naturally say. But suppose we forget all such disagreeable thoughts for a while and have some music. I am sorry that I interrupted you."

Helen at once went back to the organ, and with

Nathan standing by her side, she played hymn after hymn. The glory of departing day flooded the church with a soft rich light. It illuminated chancel and sanctuary; it transfigured the worn pews and kneeling-benches, while the cracked and stained walls appeared less unsightly. It touched the head and face of the woman at the organ and the man standing by her side. As the light of day gradually faded, so did their troubles. They drifted back to days long past, and to memories sweet and precious. So absorbed were they in the music and in each other's company, that they did not notice Bill Tooke, who had glided up stealthily to the door of the church, and stood for a few minutes watching the two with eyes of wicked triumph. Bill had come across something of great importance to him, and ere long he was speeding on his way, eager to impart his discovery to another.

At length Helen ceased playing, and rose to her feet.

"My, how late it is!" she exclaimed. "I must hurry home. How fast the time has gone!"

Side by side they walked out of the church, and over the field toward the shore where the little boat was lying. They talked about other days, the friends they had known, and the pleasant parties they had attended. The present with all its cares had slipped away, and the past alone held them in its golden embrace.

Nathan stood upon the shore and watched Helen as she rowed swiftly homeward. In fact, he stood there for some time after she had disappeared from view, a lone figure as motionless as the placid water over which he was steadily gazing.

CHAPTER 22

When the Bell Rang

WHILE Helen Preston was bending steadily to the oars, moving straight toward her own shore, two men were standing upon a hill some distance away. They were watching her, for the darkness had not deepened sufficiently to hide her from view. One of the men was doing most of the talking at first, while the other merely interjected an occasional question.

"I saw them in the church," Bill Tooke was saying, "an' their heads were right close together. Your wife was sittin' at the organ, an' Stone had his right arm around her."

"Was my wife playing?" Preston asked.

"Oh, yes, that is, her fingers were runnin' over the keys, but I guess she didn't know what she was doin'."

"Did you ever see them there before, Bill?"

"Yes, several times."

"Why didn't you tell me about this before?"

"Because I thought it was none of my business. But I couldn't resist tellin' ye this time, fer I thought ye should know. They're in love with each other, by the way they acted."

"And I believed that Helen always stayed at home," Preston remarked, as if to himself. "I never imagined this of her. She has always pretended to be

so religious that I felt I could trust her. But that is what this d—— religion does," he fiercely added.

"Women are really no better than men, fer all their church goin'," Bill replied. "They should be better, though, fer we look to them to be examples to our children, an' teach 'em right things. But men must have their fling now an' then, which is only natural. You do it yerself, sir."

"I know I do, Bill, and so do you. But we expect our wives to act differently. They should stay at home; that's the place for them."

"An' not be runnin' after a jail-bird, Ned?"

"Certainly not. That d—— fool has caused too much trouble in my life already. He's a pious hypocrite, that's what he is. He's interfered a great deal with me in the past, but when it comes to his meddling with my wife, that's more than I can stand."

"But he's very religious, too, is he not?" Bill queried. "He's undertaken to repair the church at his own expense. Why, the Parson is delighted, an' thinks he's a wonder."

"H'm!" Preston grunted in disgust. "The church! The church! I'm sick and tired of hearing about it. Why, it's always interfering with a man's freedom. And the Parson, too. He's got the people in this parish right under his thumb, and what he says goes. He frightens them out of their senses by his talk about Hell. Bah! what do I care about such nonsense? It's superstitious rot, that's what it is, and the sooner it's stopped the better it will be for all concerned. The world would be a decent place to live in but for churches and whining hypocrites of parsons."

And thus the two men conversed, creatures of evil,

to whom nobleness of character and purity of life made no appeal. Their own hearts being so bad, they could see no good in others, and all true motives were blackened by their low imaginations. Such men would do away with the Church and religion entirely, and would prefer the reign of vice and licentiousness. And yet betwen these two men there was a gulf. Bill Tooke was completely of the earth, earthy, so evil deeds and evil talk were as meat and drink to him. Ned Preston, on the other hand, was fighting a terrible battle against his conscience. It was goading him, allowing him no rest, and so rebellious was his spirit that he lashed himself into fury in his mad efforts to escape. He defied his Creator, and when alone at night he would sometimes shake his clenched fist at the silent heavens. Religion, too, he believed was his mortal enemy, and when he heard people lauding Nathan Strong for his voluntary work upon the church, his anger was intense. Then when the serpent in the form of Bill Tooke breathed into his ears the lie about Helen, his heart overflowed with rage. Had he stopped to reason he would have remembered that Bill was an inveterate liar, and that Helen was pure and free from all deceit. But he was a man far from normal now, half-crazed by that inward voice which would not be stilled, no matter how hard he struggled against it.

Preston was in this mood as he parted from his companion that evening, and made his way toward his own home. He longed to meet Helen, and declare unto her what he had just heard. But he shrank from such an encounter, knowing full well that he could not endure the expression that would appear upon her face and the look of reproach in her eyes. He knew

that she would say little in self-defense. If she would only scold, or storm at him, it would give him a chance to relieve his feelings. But to see her standing before him in the dignity of her simplicity and purity would be more than he could endure. Only when he had been drinking heavily did he have the false courage to face her, and give vent to his maudlin thoughts.

He stopped ere he had gone far, and sat for a while by the side of the road. The twilight faded, and darkness enshrouded the land. Several autos sped by, and one farm waggon rumbled past, but he paid no attention to these, so absorbed was he with his own misery. Nature's sweet peace and rest had no effect upon his heart and mind. When agitated conscience with its flaming sword is at war with a legion of demons within a man, then terrible is the conflict, and the outcome uncertain. But this night the powers of darkness had the mastery of Ned Preston, and crushed down the voice of the true monitor within. He gave himself up to their wild urgings, and followed their mad promptings.

Rising at length to his feet, he walked back over the road he had recently travelled. At first he moved slowly, but in a few minutes he was hurrying on his way, gliding like a spectre through the night. As he came near the house of his enemy, his rapid pace slackened, and he advanced more cautiously. A light shining from one of the windows attracted his attention, and toward this he stealthily crept. He stooped when a few feet away, and peered in upon Nathan sitting near his table, apparently lost in thought. Preston's hand clenched hard, and a gurgle of rage welled up in his throat as he watched his adversary.

He envied him his quietness and peace of mind. He longed to turn the demons that were tormenting his own soul into Nathan's, but he realized that such a thing was impossible. Each man was reaping what he had sown; one the whirlwind, the other the joy of a good conscience.

When Preston at last stepped away from the window, he was more spiteful than ever. Whatever slight aversion he had felt for the deed he was contemplating now vanished entirely. In its stead came the wild and the ungovernable desire to carry out his design as speedily and ruthlessly as possible.

His steps led him toward the church, lying silently and unseen in the valley beyond. He sped through a grove of trees, and passed the grave yard, where the white stones stood out faintly against the darkness of night. No thought of the peaceful dead who rested there entered the mind of the infuriated man. No vision of toil-worn men and women who had carved for themselves homes in the wilderness, and who were buried here, came to him. Neither did the church, which he presently reached, affect him in the slightest degree with the spirit of reverence and respect. As he pushed open the always-unlocked door, entered, and groped his way up the middle aisle, no voice whispered to him words of warning. He never once thought of the noble and earnest ones who had erected that building almost seventy-five years before, nor of the sacrifices they had made to accomplish the task. He could not see the saintly men of God who had ministered there. He caught no glimpse of fond parents bringing their little ones for baptism, or of young couples standing at the altar-rail, pledging their troth to one another in holy matrimony. Not for

his mental vision were the slow processions which had wended their way to that church to perform the last sad rites over loved ones. How could such a man understand what that sacred edifice meant to the people of the parish? It was closely and deeply interwoven into their very lives. It was their spiritual home, and they looked upon it with more than ordinary reverence. It was a precious heritage, handed down to them to guard and maintain. Its sweet-toned bell summoned them to worship, and its finger-like spire pointed them to higher things.

Well would it have been for Ned Preston had he paused for a few minutes to consider all this. Unfortunately, he was a man now beyond the power of reasonable thought. To him that building was nothing more than were the precious treasures of ancient Rome to the marauding Goths and Vandals. It was merely an object to be destroyed to satisfy the deep-seated spirit of revenge and hatred.

Having reached the chancel steps, Preston paused. He then reached out and laid his right hand upon the large Prayer Book, lying upon the reading-desk. This he quickly opened, and tore out several of the pages. These he crushed in his hands, and then jerking forth a match from his vest pocket, he struck it, and applied it to the inflammable material. As the blaze started up, he stepped forward, flung the burning mass upon the altar, and watched with glee as the flames swiftly caught upon the light fabric on the wall. The words, "Holy, Holy, Holy," on the front of the re-table stood out with startling splendor, as if in silent rebuke to the man who had thus dared to profane the sacred place. But upon the violator they made not the least impression. He watched until sure that his deed was

successful, and he then lifted his right hand and gave expression to a terrible curse.

"I defy the God of heaven in whose House I stand," he cried. "I defy Him to punish me for this deed. Let all such places of superstition and hypocrisy come to a like end."

He ceased, turned and stepped down to the organ.

"Here they stood together, my wife and my enemy," he continued. "Never more will they come here to make love and deceive me. I curse them both, and may it happen to them as to this building."

Down the aisle he strode, with the roar of rushing flames sounding in his ears, and the smoke of burning wood and cloth filling his nostrils. He had other work to do before leaving the building; so laying his hands upon the bell rope, he pulled it with all his strength. Over and over went the bell in wild gyrations, as if startled by such an unfamiliar touch. It no longer sent forth its sweet, even-toned notes of peace and good-will. It was a mighty voice now, pealing out its clarion message of terror, and bidding all to arouse and save the building from destruction. Neither did it appeal in vain, for up and down the river, in all houses within hearing distance, men and women rushed to doors and windows with startled faces and fast-beating hearts. Never before had they been so peremptorily summoned. But when they saw their beloved church so brilliantly lighted, they understood the meaning, so seizing pails in their hands they hurried out into the night.

The man responsible for all this excitement at length dropped the rope and stood for a few seconds watching the leaping flames. When he left the church. he did not go back by the way he had come, but

turned to the right and entered a grove of thick bushes beyond. There he stopped, and peered keenly forth, waiting for the arrival of the neighbors. He was sure that they would come, and he gloated over the thought of their excitement and dismay.

"Now, let them send up their pious prayers," he muttered. "If that d—— building is as holy as people make out, it's a wonder that it burns. By the way that fire's taking hold inside, it looks as if the place is saturated with the sulphur of Hell instead of the incense of Heaven. But, ah, here they come now! The fun's just beginning."

CHAPTER 23

Destruction

NATHAN had spent a wonderful evening in the quietness of his own house after his return from the shore. The vision of Helen was ever before him, and he lived over again his conversation with her in the church, and their walk to the river. Her troubled face and lustrous eyes he again beheld, and the sound of her voice lingered in his mind. Gradually he drifted back to other days, and all that Helen had meant to him then. How different life would have been but for the strange turn of the wheel of Fate. Whenever the thought of Preston came to him, he crushed it back with a great effort, determined not to think of him more than he could help.

He was thus calmly musing when the wild ringing of the church bell brought him to his feet with a bound. Rushing to the door, he opened it and looked out. Through the trees he could see the brightly-illumined building, and at once surmised the meaning. The church was on fire! Hurrying into the kitchen, he seized an empty pail and, forgetting his hat, he dashed out of the house and sped down across the field. Often he stumbled in the darkness, but he knew his way, and when he at length passed forth from the grove of trees he came in full view of the church. The sound of the bell had ceased, and no one was visible. But the building was a blaze of light, as if

illuminated by a thousand electric globes, showing plainly that the fire was within. From neighboring houses he heard the sound of voices, telling him that others were astir and alive to the menace that was threatening their place of worship.

As he drew near the church Nathan realized that all hope of saving the building was past. Although the flames had not yet burst forth, the fire was raging inside, and it would be utterly impossible to do anything with only buckets to carry water. As he stood staring upon the doomed structure, others arrived, men and women, some hatless, coatless, and even shoeless. Silently they huddled together, watching the wonderful sight, their hearts filled with a grief that was mingled with awe.

It was not long before the cracking of glass was heard, and at once huge wreathes of flames darted forth from the windows, and in a short time the whole of the eastern portion of the building was at the mercy of the devouring monster. The wood work was as dry as tinder, thus forming excellent fuel for the greedy flames which rose higher and higher, sending up vast columns of smoke into the night. The roar of the fire steadily increased, until it became almost deafening. And all the time more people arrived. Some walked around the church, and viewed it from every angle, but all were helpless to do anything.

The fire by now had the church at its complete mercy, and the flames were leaping through the roof, and spreading rapidly to the western end. They began to curl up around the spire, drawn upwards by great draughts of air. Reaching out like huge clutching fingers, they encircled the cross just as the Parson appeared upon the scene. Nathan never forgot the ex-

pression upon the old man's face as he walked quietly into their midst. He uttered no word, but stood watching the destruction of the building in which he had ministered for so many years. Once he made a sudden movement as if to spring forward to rescue something in the church. But he stopped short and lifted his right hand to his forehead, as if dazed and puzzled by his complete helplessness.

The heat was now so intense that all were forced to move farther back. Their attention was centered upon the spire. It was a glowing mass, but as the flames swirled aside for an instant, the cross appeared, erect and unharmed. A deep feeling of awe came into the hearts of the watchers. Then when two great fiery columns leaped suddenly out from the belfry, and swept high into the air, leaving the cross untouched, a cry of astonishment went up from the lips of all. And thus it remained while the fire raged below, as if nothing could harm that symbol of redemption.

Fiercer and fiercer grew the fire until the entire building was a seething mass. The roof fell in with a crash and, as it fell, extra-huge volumes of smoke and flames rolled skyward. And still the spire stood erect as ever, wrapped in its fiery mantle. The straining eyes of all watched it with intense interest. It seemed a supernatural thing standing there looking down upon the dire ruin below. But steadily the fire ate through the heavy timbers, and when at last the proud structure lurched, and then toppled earthward, the people rushed wildly back with loud cries of fear and dismay. And truly it was an awe-inspiring spectacle. As the spire hurtled through the air, it appeared like a huge flaming meteor dashing to the earth on a mission of destruction.

No sooner had the mass fallen, than a strange, weird

noise, resembling a cry of despair, sounded forth from the bushes beyond. It came but once, and although all looked in that direction with white faces and fast-beating hearts, they did not hear it again. What was the meaning of that cry? they asked one another. Had it anything to do with the burning of the church? But no one could answer these questions, and although they turned to the Parson for some explanation, he was unable to enlighten them.

"My dear people," he said, "this is a sad night for us. Our beloved church is in ruins, and we have witnessed its destruction. The holy place in which you and your fathers and mothers worshipped is no more than a heap of burning embers. But God's will be done, so we must not despair, but bear up bravely. It will mean a great sacrifice on our part to build another church. But we have the glorious example of the noble men and women of the past. As they built well and strong, so can we. Let us not be dismayed nor cast down. God will help us, and that right early."

The venerable man turned partly around to hide his emotion, and Nathan noticed that tears were in his eyes. He admired the man now more than ever, and he determined there and then to take a prominent part in the erection of another building. He, like the others, was greatly puzzled over the burning of the church. Who had rung the bell? And what was the cause of that peculiar cry that had winged its way to them from the bushes? He noticed that some of the people were now talking earnestly to one another about these very things, and he listened to what they were saying.

"I was jist gittin' ready fer bed," Peter Martin announced, "when the bell began to ring. I knew at once that something out of the ordinary was the matter. I

tell ye, it seems to me that no earthly hands pulled that rope. It must have been an angel that did it."

"Or the devil," Nathan replied. "I don't believe an angel had anything to do with it."

"What about that cry, then, that we heard from the bushes?" Peter asked.

"That I cannot explain, Mr. Martin, as it is all very mysterious. But the two may be closely related. Perhaps we shall find out ere long."

"You are quite right, Mr. Stone," the Parson remarked. "I feel quite sure that there is some explanation for the cause of the fire, and that the mystery will be solved. There is nothing that we can do now, so we might as well go home. Thank you, my good people," he added, "for responding so promptly. Oh, if we had only been able to save our church!"

Nathan hardly heard what he said, for his attention was centered upon Bill Tooke, who was standing a short distance away, talking earnestly with a number of men. He wondered why the latter glanced occasionally in his direction, as if Bill were talking about him. At length they walked away, and he saw no more of Bill that night. But he could not banish the scene from his mind, and he was curious to know what Tooke had been saying.

Gradually the neighbors left and went back to their own houses. The Parson, too, departed. Nathan watched him as he walked slowly and wearily to his carriage some distance up the road. He felt sorry for the man, who had spent so many years in the parish in noble, self-sacrificing service. The burning of the church was a blow hard for him to endure, notwithstanding his strong faith. What a terrible thing it would be if the fire had been set on purpose! At

once Bill Tooke came into his mind. The fellow was capable of almost any degree of villainy, he felt sure, but what reason would he have for destroying the House of God? What harm had it done him that he should turn his hand against it?

The fire still burned fiercely, devouring the frame of the church, and sending up its clouds of smoke and flames into the air. A few remained with Nathan to keep watch lest the fire should spread across the field and into the bushes beyond. As Nathan stood gazing upon the scene of desolation before him, he thought of the pleasant time he had spent there with Helen but a few hours before. What sweet music had filled the building, a striking contrast to the roaring mass upon which he now looked! The abode of peace and rest was gone, and in its stead nothing but hot seething ruins.

He thought about this as he at length wended his way homeward, accompanied by the rest of the men. He went into his house, but he did not feel satisfied. He could not get Bill Tooke out of his mind, and gradually he began to associate him with the burning of the church. Perhaps the fellow had rung the bell, and then had uttered that cry among the bushes to startle the people and make them believe that the deed had been committed by spirits of evil. He tried to banish this uncharitable feeling from his mind, and went out upon the verandah. The moon had now risen, and was riding above the distant trees, and gleaming in a long, silver path across the water. Objects became more distinct. The light of the fire could be seen through the trees, and the crackling could be distinctly heard. A strange desire urged him to go back to the scene of destruction. He had read at

times about criminals returning to the places where they had committed evil deeds. Perhaps the guilty one might creep back this night to view the effect of his work, and if so, there would be a chance to capture the villain.

Leaving the verandah, Nathan hurried once more across the field, and passed through the graveyard, where the trees would hide him from view. From here he swerved to the left, and entered the grove of bushes from whence the weird sound had come. At the farther edge he stopped, sat down upon the ground, and watched the open space between him and the site of the church. Higher rose the moon and flooded the landscape with its bright beams. Not a movement did Nathan make as he crouched there, silently waiting to see what would happen. Neither did he have to wait long, for presently he saw a man emerge from among the bushes on the left and glide cautiously toward him. Nathan almost stopped breathing as he passed by but a few feet away, and instantly he recognized Ned Preston. So great was his surprise that it was with difficulty he controlled himself. Never for a minute had he connected Ned with the destruction of the church, and even now he could scarcely believe his senses. But there he was before him, moving toward the burning embers. Keeping well within the bushes, Nathan followed, using every precaution, lest a twig should snap beneath his feet and thus betray his presence. Just at the very line, where the grove ended, Preston paused and stared upon the ruins. For a few minutes he stood like a statue, and then threw up his hands and gave expression to a groan of despair. He next sank upon his knees, and remained in this position for some time.

Nathan could not understand the meaning of these strange actions. He had the feeling that Ned was demented, and did not realise where he was. Another groan came from the kneeling figure, and then he sprang to his feet and took a few steps forward.

"I did it! I did it!" he wailed. "I destroyed Thy House, O Lord! I did not know You were there. I saw You on the cross when it fell, and You looked at me. Oh! oh!"

For an instant the unhappy man buried his face in his hands. Lifting his head, he rushed forward, seized the charred cross and dragged it after him to a large tree. Here he placed it in an upright position, and then stepped back and silently looked upon it.

Nathan was intensely moved by what he beheld. He knew now for a certainty that Ned Preston had set fire to the church. A feeling of anger surged up within him. This was but another of the many deeds of infamy the man had committed. But it would be his last. No longer must he be allowed to continue his work of destruction. "Now is your time," a voice within him whispered. "Put the villain in the Penitentiary, his rightful place. You will be thus revenged for the wrong he has done to you. Do not delay any longer." Strong, indeed, was this temptation, and Nathan was in the proper mood to act upon the suggestion. But again the vision of Helen rose before him, causing him to hesitate. For her sake he had spared Ned until now, and he must go on as he had begun. So great was his love for her, that he determined once again to shield her, and conceal from her and others Ned's sacrilege in destroying the House of God. But the man should be punished, and taught a severe lesson.

"I did it! Lord, I did it!" Again came that wailing cry, startling in its abject despair. "Punish me no longer! It is more than I can endure!"

As Nathan listened and watched, there suddenly flashed into his mind the meaning of all this. Ned was struggling against the Lord! His soul was being terribly tortured, and in the spirit of revenge he had burned the church. Ah, it was all clear now! His strange words about the cross and his vision of the Master thereon, were explained. Nathan trembled as he thought of this. Ned was receiving his punishment, and it was the Lord's doing. As he dealt with Saul of Tarsus so long ago, so now, perhaps, he was dealing with Ned Preston. The idea was startling, and a feeling of awe swept through Nathan's soul. As he watched the agony of the man out there before the cross, he realised that his punishment was more severe and effective than any that human minds could devise. Ned Preston was passing through a terrible ordeal, he was well aware. He was suffering for his evil deeds, and he could not escape. He had brought upon himself the misery he was now undergoing.

For some time Preston remained before the cross, now silent and erect as a statue. At last he turned and gazed for a while upon the ruins of the church. Nathan longed to know what was passing through his mind. But as he watched and waited, the distracted man suddenly turned, fled back to the shelter of the bushes, and disappeared from view.

Nathan looked to see what had caused Ned's hurried flight, and at once saw the form of Bill Tooke slinking among the trees near the edge of the graveyard.

CHAPTER 24

Where Flows the Brook

THE burning of the church caused great excitement throughout the entire parish, and during the morning numerous teams rattled along the road. People were anxious to see the ruins, and they came from far and near. Nathan found it impossible to sleep, although he was very tired. After he had eaten his breakfast, he picked up his fishing-rod, and examined it. He then went outside and dug some bait. He decided to spend the day back in the hills, along the brook which flowed into the river a short distance from his house.

There was a special reason why he wished to do this. He wanted to be alone that he might think over all that had taken place down by the church. He was in no mood to go there again this morning to listen to what people would have to say. There was no work calling for his attention, and out in the woods he could think more clearly. The silence of the hills always strengthened him, and the rippling brook was fascinating.

Having prepared a simple lunch, he started on his way, and noon found him well inland, seated on the bank of the stream near a deep clear pool, quietly smoking. Several trout lay by his side, and also his fishing-rod. He was satisfied with his catch, for true

sportsman that he was, he took only enough fish for his immediate need.

At length he laid aside his pipe and leaned back comfortably against the mossy bank. The water murmured on its way, making the sweetest of music in his ears. Birds twittered and chirped as they flitted from tree to tree, while an occasional squirrel scolded from some nearby branch. Nathan's upturned face noted several large birds sailing overhead, and great fleecy clouds drifting across the vast expanse of blue. He thought of Preston and his agony of soul. Helen, too, came into his mind, and of her he meditated most of all. Again he pictured her as he had seen her last night at the church, seated at the organ. How he longed for a quiet abode in just such a spot as here, away from all distractions of the world and with Helen by his side. He knew that they would be happy together, for he was sure that she loved him, even, perhaps, as much as he loved her.

And as he lay there, he drifted off into dreamland, and a beautiful vision appeared to him. He was really living in the woods, right by the brook. The house nestled on the hillside, in front of which was a garden, and standing in the midst of the flowers was Helen with such a happy expression upon her face, and the light of love in her eyes. She was gathering flowers, picking them with much care and pleasure. He could see her so clearly, and how young she seemed, and so graceful.

Then the sound of children's voices came to him, and he saw two little white-clad figures playing by the brook, and laughing as they threw sticks into the current. The voices sounded louder now, and then there came a cry of fear which aroused him. Startled,

he sat upright and looked around. At once he beheld two children but a short distance away, standing close to each other, and staring at him with fear depicted upon their faces. This expression changed when they recognized the man as the carpenter who had repaired the fence by their house. Nathan knew them, too, and his face brightened.

"Did I frighten you?" he asked.

"Yes, you did," the boy replied. "We didn't see you till we were almost on top of you. Funny place to sleep, this, isn't it?"

Before Nathan could again speak, he caught sight of Helen coming toward them, hurrying as fast as she could along the bank of the brook. But when she saw Nathan, her steps slackened, and the anxious expression upon her face vanished.

"Oh, I am so glad that nothing is the matter," she began. "I heard the cry of fright, and imagined all sorts of things. But we didn't expect to find any one in this lonely place."

"Neither did I," Nathan replied, as he rose quickly to his feet and advanced to meet her. "This is a pleasure I wasn't looking for."

"He was asleep, mother," the boy explained. "He was lying just there," and he pointed to the mossy bank which bore the impression of the man's body.

"I certainly was asleep, my little man," Nathan laughed. "If you had been up all night as I was, you, too, would go to sleep at the first chance. It's a very restful place under the shade of this big tree. Won't you all sit down? You look tired," he added, turning to Helen.

"I am not so tired as I am hot," the woman replied.

"We came through the woods and there was not a breath of wind among the trees."

"Have you been here before?" Nathan asked.

"Oh, yes. This is our favorite retreat. It is not far, straight over the hill, and there is a fine old lumber road we follow. The children like the brook, and so do I. This place is so restful."

Her face grew very serious and an anxious light appeared in her eyes. Nathan believed that he knew the meaning, although he made no comment. Instead, he picked up a piece of wood lying at his feet, and drawing forth his pocket-knife, began to whittle it into shape.

"What are you making?" the boy asked.

"Just you wait and see," Nathan replied. "But let us all sit down and you can watch me."

In another minute they were seated upon the mossy bank, with the children close around him, their eyes fixed intently upon the piece of wood. The way he handled the knife fascinated them. But when they saw that it was a boat he was carving, they shouted with delight.

"He's making a boat, mother!" the boy cried.

"He's matin' a boat, muvver!" the girl echoed.

Helen smiled as she sat watching a few feet away. Nathan knew that her eyes were fixed upon them, and he wondered what was passing through her mind. As for himself, he was supremely happy. Helen was near, just where he longed for her to be, and his dream was wonderfully fulfilled. How surprised she would be if he told her about it. But that would be giving himself away, so he decided to remain silent.

When at last the boat was carved to his satisfaction, he went to a birch tree nearby, stripped off a piece

of bark, and from this he shaped a tiny sail, which he fastened to a small mast. When all was finished, he placed the boat in the water. The children were greatly pleased, and sailed it up and down the edge of the pool.

Side by side upon the bank the man and the woman sat watching the little ones. For a few minutes they did not speak, so taken up were they with their own thoughts.

"Happy days of childhood," Helen at length remarked. "What a pity they must pass so quickly."

"But would we be happy to be always children?" Nathan asked.

"I suppose not," and the woman sighed. "But just think of the many worries and responsibilities children escape."

"Perhaps we older ones are stronger for them, though. Character is developed in the stress and strain of life, that is, if we hold to our high ideals."

"Then, you must be very strong, Nathan. It is a great mystery to me how you have come through your terrible trials with such a brave, true spirit. Why some men, if they had been treated as you have been, would be brutes or raging fiends. I cannot understand it."

"And so would I, Helen, but for a great light which has guided me, and has been my inspiration. Even, then, it has meant terrible battles in which I nearly lost. I have never been sure of myself. The old deceiver is still very powerful within me, and often drives me to the verge of despair. When he gets exceptionally busy I like to come to a place such as this. The quietness of the hills and the forest has a

calming and a restraining effect, and I am able to see things more clearly and in their true light."

"Why, that is the way I feel," Helen replied. "I come here for the same reason. My home life, as you must know, is sadly wrecked, and if I stayed there all the time I am sure that I would go out of my mind. Ned has had terrible moods lately, and there is no living with him. Oh! I do not know what will be the outcome of all this. Sometimes I wish——"

She ceased abruptly, and sat very erect, her hands clenched tightly together, resting upon her lap. Nathan longed to know about that wish of hers, and hoped that she might explain. This she did not do, but remained silent, watching the children.

"Is Ned at home now?" Nathan asked.

"No. He came home very early this morning, and left right after breakfast in the car. He was in a sad condition, his eyes so blood-shot, and his face as white as death. He seemed to be very much afraid of something, although he would tell me nothing. When I asked him what was the matter, he glared at me like a wild beast, but made no reply. Oh, I don't know what to do! I am completely distracted."

So overcome was she, that she bowed her head, and tears streamed down her cheeks. Her body shook with her suppressed sobs. Nathan was at a loss for suitable words, so he rose to his feet, and went over to where the children were playing. He tried to interest himself in what they were doing, but he could not keep his mind from that grief-stricken woman upon the bank. He knew it was better that she should be alone for a while until her grief had spent itself. He longed to go to her, to comfort her, but he felt

that he could not trust himself. He might give way to words which he would regret. He talked to the children, and showed them how to sail the boat, but anger against Ned Preston was strong in his heart. He wanted to go to the villain, and deal with him as he deserved. But he could not forget Ned's agony before the cross, and the apparent change that was coming over the man. He could not tell Helen anything about this, for he wished to keep from her the knowledge that would only increase her trouble. If he told her that her husband had set fire to the church, what a terrible additional blow it would be to her. She had enough to bear now without that.

In a few minutes Helen joined them. She was smiling, although tears still gleamed in her eyes. Nathan's heart quickened as she came and stood by his side. He admired her for assuming a bright appearance and a courage she did not feel. The children, tired of their play, clamored for something to eat.

"I want a cookie, mother," the boy demanded.

"I want a tookie, muvver," the girl repeated. "I'se hungie."

"Indeed you must be, dears," the mother declared, as she turned to the bank where the lunch basket was lying. "You will join us, will you not?" she asked turning to Nathan. "There is plenty for all."

"I shall be pleased to do so," Nathan replied. "But may I share with you my humble lunch? There is a spring a short distance away where the water is as cold as ice."

In a short time they were all seated upon the ground in picnic style, the children doing most of the talking. Helen and Nathan were content to remain silent and

listen to the chatter of the little ones. But when the meal was finished, and the children were again playing happily by the water, the man and the woman remained seated.

"It has been a long time since I enjoyed such a meal as this," Nathan remarked. "When I left home this morning, I never expected to meet you here. This has really been my dinner, for it came next to breakfast with me. I am all mixed up to-day, anyway, owing to being up all night. You heard about the burning of the church, I suppose."

"Oh, yes. The Parson told me all about it this morning. The poor old man is almost heart-broken. I feel so sorry for him. It will be hard to build a new church. There was some insurance, so he told me, but it will not go very far. How I wish that I could afford to erect a new building. What a joy it would be to see God's House restored."

As Helen uttered these words, a thought flashed into Nathan's mind which gave him a great thrill. It was just the inspiration he needed, and it was the woman he loved who had given it. He had the means, or he would have them, so why should he not do it? Would it not be well to spend some of Halton's money in such a good cause? It would be his to use, and he had little need for it himself. He preferred to work with his own hands for his living, and not lead a life of luxury and ease. It was a great idea, and as his eyes rested upon the children, his mind was busy with his plans.

"I can never forget the old church." It was Helen again speaking, and her voice aroused Nathan from his reverie. "It was there that I found such rest and comfort."

"Neither shall I ever forget last night when we were there together," Nathan replied. "It brought back memories of the past when we were so happy and free from all cares."

"How little we then knew, Nathan, what lay ahead of us. And we do not know now. I tremble when I think of what the morrow may bring forth. This has been a blessed afternoon to me, but it is getting late, so I must take the children home. Thank you very much for your pleasant company and inspiring words."

"I wish that we could have many such afternoons," Nathan fervently declared. "Remember, Helen, if I can help you in any way, let me know. Although legally you belong to another, and that only through base deception, yet I always consider you as mine, and that we were always meant for each other. But, please forgive me for speaking so plainly."

He rose abruptly to his feet, his whole body trembling. Helen rose also, and her face was unusually pale. Side by side they walked down along the brook, the children running on ahead, talking and laughing with glee. When they at length reached the old lumber road, Helen held out her hand.

"We must part here," she said, "you to go your way, and I mine. But I feel stronger for your sympathy, and the brave way you have faced all your trials. Good-by."

Nathan grasped her hand, raised it for an instant to his lips. He then turned and hurried on his way without once looking back.

CHAPTER 25

For the Sake of a Child

COMING at length to a large maple tree overhanging the left side of the brook, Nathan stopped and sat down upon the bank to rest. His brain was in a tumult, for he felt that he had overstepped the mark in what he had said to Helen. What must she think of his indiscreet words? Although she might forgive him, he could not forgive himself. But how could he help being carried away by his overwhelming love? The only safe course was to keep away from her. And yet, he had not sought her that afternoon. They had come together by accident. But was it an accident? Was Fate overruling their destiny? He recalled their meeting at the church. He had merely gone there after his plane, and he had met Helen. And so upon this simple fishing trip he had come across her again. Then he suddenly remembered a sermon he had heard the Parson preach. It was about Saul who went forth to find his father's asses, and he found a Kingdom instead. The clergyman had enlarged upon this, showing that as we go about our common daily tasks the Lord is really leading us to greater things; that we are in His hands, and He is directing all our ways. Was He doing the same now? Nathan wondered. Was there a definite purpose in the way he and Helen

had several times unexpectedly met? It seemed so, and the idea gave him considerable satisfaction.

As he thus sat and mused, he became gradually aware of the beauty and the glory surrounding him. Not a breath of wind stirred the air, and the big maple at his side was clearly reflected in the deep placid pool at his feet. He looked up at the tree and noted its strength and grandeur. Although some of its roots had been torn and twisted by raging torrents when the brook flowed full to the river, yet it stood firm and unyielding. It was good to watch it, and a great inspiration came into his heart. The roots of his own life had been terribly bruised and torn, but he had tried to remain true and hold himself erect in the face of all. And he would do so still. Although enemies had assailed him, and he had lost the woman he loved, yet he would not give way, but would remain faithful to the best that was in him. He had been with Helen that afternoon, he had talked with her, and he believed that she really cared for him. This thought gave him much comfort, and he experienced a thrill of pleasure as he pictured her sitting or standing by his side. She, too, was somewhat like the maple, firm, noble, and graceful, notwithstanding all she had endured. It was well that Nathan stopped near that old tree for such a quiet meditation. He little knew that in a short time he would need every particle of strength and inspiration he there received.

When he at last reached the highway, he walked slowly along, his fishing-rod in one hand and his string of trout in the other. As he came in sight of his house, he saw his neighbor, Peter Martin, standing by the back door. He wondered what the

man was doing there, as it was unusual for him to visit his place at this time of the day.

"Where in the world have ye been?" Peter abruptly demanded as Nathan approached. "I've spent the hull afternoon tryin' to git me eyes on ye."

"Your tongue, you mean," Nathan laughingly replied, as he laid aside his rod and fish. "What's the matter, anyway, Mr. Martin? You look as solemn as a funeral."

"An' I feel solemn, Mr. Stone. "I've got somethin' important to tell ye, an' I want to git over with it as soon as I kin."

"Well, then, suppose we sit upon the verandah, Mr. Martin. I'm tired after my tramp, and hot, too."

"An' ye'll be hotter still when I tell ye what's goin' on in this parish," Peter retorted, as he limped after Nathan. "Dear me!" he groaned, sinking wearily down upon a chair, "I don't know what the world's comin' to, anyway. Things ain't what they used to be around here."

"Out with it, Mr. Martin," Nathan ordered, feeling certain now that something out of the ordinary had taken place. "Nobody killed, I hope?"

"Not yit, though some deserve to be. It's about you, an' as ye've been so very kind to me, I consider it my duty to stand by ye through thick an' thin. I'm in hot water already, but I'll stand it a great deal hotter before I desert me best friend."

"About me!" Nathan exclaimed. "Why, where do I come in? Hurry up and tell me."

"Yes, it's about you, Mr. Stone. There is a report goin' the rounds that you burned the church. Jist think of that!"

Instead of expressing surprise or anger, Nathan

laughed outright. Peter did not expect this, so looked at his companion in astonishment.

"There's nuthin' to laugh at Mr. Stone," he reminded. "It's a very serious charge."

"I know it is, Mr. Martin, and so serious that it oversteps the mark, and becomes ridiculous. No sane person would believe such a thing for a minute. Why, wasn't I doing my best to repair the church? What reason would I have for destroying it?"

"Quite true, an' that's what I've been explainin', sir. But it makes no difference what I say, fer all believe it."

"They do! And after what I have done!

"Oh, that doesn't count one bit. They have never 'fergotten that you were in the Penitentiary, an' if ye did wrong years ago, ye'll do the same now. It's in yer nature, so they say, an' it's bound to come out sooner or later."

Nathan was becoming rather nettled now. It was more serious than he had at first thought. He could hardly believe that his past record would be thus brought up against him in connection with the burning of the church. But there must be some reason for all this.

"Who started such a rumor?" he asked. "Did anyone see me?"

"Bill Tooke says he did, an' that he rang the bell when you ran away."

Nathan rose suddenly to his feet, every muscle in his body quivering with excitement. He towered above his neighbor, his hands clenched and his eyes blazing.

"Are you sure Bill Tooke told that?" he demanded.

"Sure, fer I heard him with me own ears. I called

him a liar, an' he was goin' to knock me down when several men interferred an' stopped him. But he is a liar, an' I know it."

"He is, Mr. Martin. I never burned that church. Why, it is the last thing in the world I would think of doing."

"I believe ye, sir, I believe ye from the bottom of me heart. But that wasn't all of Bill's lies. He said that he saw you an' Mrs. Preston alone in the church that very evenin'."

"He did!"

"Yes, that's what he said, an' that you had yer arm around her while she was settin' at the organ, an' that ye kissed her."

With a groan Nathan sank back into his chair, his face very white. He tried to be calm, to think clearly that he might know what to do. But the overwhelming spirit of revenge pounded at his heart. The blood coursed madly through his body, and the veins on his forehead stood out like whip cords. He had been patient for so long. He had tried to do what was right, and he had been as merciful as possible to those who had injured him. But this last was more than he could endure. He had lived a quiet life among the people of the parish, and had done all in his power to help them. But now they were willing to believe such a rogue and a liar as Bill Tooke. What had it all amounted to, anyway? he asked himself. He would change his manner of living, and if people would not respect him, he would make them fear him. If they believed him to be a miserable criminal, capable of even burning the House of God, he would let them be satisfied. But first of all he would deal with Bill Tooke.

"Do all the people believe these lies about me?" he asked.

"Most of 'em do, so fer as I know. Word has gone all over the parish, so I understand, an' some heard of it last night at the fire. Bill told 'em then. Of course, the Parson won't believe sich nonsense, neither will the Fletchers, nor Widder Watters. An' mebbe there are others, fer all I know."

"Most likely there are," Nathan replied, as Helen came into his mind. The thought of her and that big maple tree had a restraining effect. He recalled his quiet meditation that afternoon, and his determination to be strong and noble. How little he knew then of the test that was just ahead. But he was not going to allow his name, and the name of the one he loved, to be defamed and made a byword throughout the parish. For Helen's sake he would face Tooke, the liar, and compel him to deny the charges he had made.

He rose to his feet, and laid his right hand upon Peter's shoulder.

"I am going to see Bill at once," he announced. "This slander must be stopped, and there is only one way it can be done."

"Don't do anythin' rash, sir," Peter pleaded. "Bill is a hard man, an' he never fergives an injury."

"I am not worrying about that, Mr. Martin, as I am well able to take care of myself."

Together they walked up the road, and when they reached Peter's gate, Nathan stopped.

"I wish to thank you, Mr. Martin, for your interest on my behalf," he said. "You have done me a good service to-day."

"I hope so, Mr. Stone, I really hope so. I did hate

to tell ye, though. But I felt ye should know jist what is goin' on."

It did not take Nathan long to come in sight of Tooke's house, and to his surprise he saw no children about the place. But when a few yards away, he heard angry voices within the building. Stepping quickly to the door, which was open, he looked in, and there he saw a stranger standing in the middle of the kitchen surrounded by the entire Tooke family. Nathan's presence was at once noticed, and Bill's face grew blacker than ever.

"What d'ye want here?" he roared. "Are ye comin' to make more trouble?"

"That was my intention," Nathan replied. "But it seems to me you've got all the trouble you can attend to at present. What's the matter, anyway?"

"That man's come to take my only cow," Bill explained. "But he won't git it, h—— if he will."

"Pay what you owe, then," the stranger replied. "You bought that cow from Dan Perkins two years ago, and you haven't paid him a cent. You'll pay me now, or I'll take your cow. I'm only doing my duty as a constable."

"I can't pay, fer I ain't got the money," Bill declared. "An' if ye take our cow, what'll the baby do fer milk? It'll die."

"I'm sorry, Bill, but I can't help it. The cow must go, then."

A hubbub followed this statement; some of the children crying, while others screamed at the constable. For a few minutes it seemed as if they would attack him and do some bodily harm. He, too, realised the danger, and edged toward the door.

Nathan in the meantime was looking at Mrs. Tooke

in one corner of the room, who was holding the baby in her arms, trying to soothe its cries. She was a worn and tired-looking woman, slovenly dressed, and appeared to have lost all interest in life. The baby was a poor miserable little thing, half fed and scantily clothed. Of a sympathetic nature to the weak, Nathan's heart went out to this tiny creature. What would become of it should the cow be taken? No matter how much Bill deserved to be punished, a helpless child should not be allowed to suffer. He stepped over to where the woman was standing.

"Do you depend upon the milk from your cow for the baby?" he asked.

"It's all he gets," was the reply. "My own breasts have been dry fer months."

"But won't you be able to get some milk from the neighbors?"

"Neighbors! We ain't got none. Bill settled that long ago."

Nathan knew only too well the truth of this. It was Bill's fault, without any doubt, that they had no neighbors who would assist in time of need. The thought angered him, and yet he could not allow this infant to suffer for lack of food. He turned to the constable.

"How much is the bill?" he inquired.

"Twenty dollars. It's more than the cow's worth, though she'll be better than nothing."

"Will you be satisfied if I settle the account?"

"You!"

"That's what I said. I happen to have some money with me, so if you agree, let us get through with the business at once. Where is the bill?"

The constable looked at Nathan as if he had not

heard aright. Then his right hand moved slowly to his pocket and brought forth a slip of paper.

"Here it is. But, say, do you realise what you are about to do? You'll never get a cent of your money back."

"That's my own outlook. Here is the money, so please receipt that bill."

While the constable was laboriously signing his name with a blunt stub of a lead pencil, Nathan counted the bills and held them in his hand until the writing was finished. He then gave the constable the twenty dollars for which he received the receipt in return. This he at once passed over to Tooke.

"You had better hold on to that," he advised. "The account is settled, so you need not worry any more about it."

Bill took the piece of paper and looked at it. His face was still sullen, and his eyes defiant. No word of thanks did he offer, but shoving the paper into a pocket, he went to the door and stepped out. The ingratitude of the man annoyed Nathan, and he was upon the point of following and settling the account he had against him. He changed his mind, however, and as he again glanced at Mrs. Tooke, he noticed the expression of relief upon her face.

"Oh, thank you, sir," she said. "I cannot tell you how grateful I am for what you have done for us. Don't mind Bill; he's got no heart."

Nathan was touched by the woman's words, so thrusting his hand into his pocket, he brought forth a five dollar bill and gave it to her.

"Use this for the baby, Mrs. Tooke, and don't let your husband get hold of it."

"He'll never see it," the woman replied, as her thin,

toil-worn fingers grasped the money. "It's the most I've had fer years. God bless ye, sir! I'm sure yer not as bad as Bill tries to make out. I'll not believe any of his yarns about ye after this. I told Bill once that ye couldn't be so bad after what ye done to the Fletchers. But he swore at me an' hit me; that's what he done, an' me his own wife, too."

Just then the baby set up a howl, and as the mother's attention was thus diverted, Nathan took advantage of the opportunity and left the house.

CHAPTER 26

The Vision

STRANGE feelings possessed Nathan's soul as he walked slowly down the road. He had started forth that evening with the express intention of teaching Bill Tooke a severe lesson. But instead, he had done just the opposite, and had befriended him by saving his cow. He had done nothing to compel the villain to refute the serious lies he had told, so people would continue to believe the stories about the burning of the church, and his action toward the wife of Ned Preston. Nathan called himself a fool for being turned from his purpose through mere sentiment. And yet, his heart was filled with a wonderful peace at what he had done.

The thought was with him all through the evening and far on into the night. The picture of that helpless babe and the poor bedraggled mother was ever before him. He had helped them, at any rate, and that was a satisfaction. Let Bill do what he might to defame him, he could not remove the glow which thrilled his soul. To be of some comfort to ones in trouble, especially women and children, was a reward in itself. He felt ashamed of his anger that evening, and resolved never again to lose control of himself. He would be like that tree by the brook, strong and upright, no matter what might happen. He repudiated his resolve to act the villain people believed him

to be, and he determined to prove to them that he was a man with a true heart, even though he was a jail-bird.

With this desire, Nathan longed to be up and doing. He could not account for it, but there came suddenly into his mind the words Helen had uttered that afternoon in connection with the re-building of the church. He rose from his chair and paced rapidly up and down the room. This was something he could do, and to what better purpose could he devote Halton's money? It would please Helen, he well knew, and it would show the people of the parish that he was not as bad as they had been led to believe. This idea was inspiring, and he walked the floor like a conqueror, unheeding the time as it slipped silently by.

It was late when he went to bed, but he could not sleep; his brain was too active for that. He planned what he should do, and the kind of church he would build. It must be much better than the old one, modern in design, graceful in form, and of considerable architectural beauty within and without. It would be a lasting monument to him, and it would give him great favor in the eyes of all. What a joy it would be to Helen to behold such a beautiful building, and to know that he had done it for her sake.

And as he lay there, with the picture of the new church in his mind and what it would mean to him, a strange thing happened. It seemed as if a mysterious presence pervaded the room, and that a wonderful message was being communicated to him without the sound of any voice. It was startling and filled him with awe. And stranger still, he saw words most distinctly, and gradually below them there appeared the image of a church, beautiful in design

and workmanship. "In My Name only. For My Glory only." Such was the message standing out in letters limmed with fire. It faded, disappeared, returned clearer than ever, and then vanished entirely.

The perspiration was standing out in beads upon Nathan's forehead, and he was trembling violently. He arose, lighted his lamp, and gazed around the room. But nothing out of the ordinary could he see.

"I must have been dreaming," he muttered. "But, no, I am certain that I was wide awake. A dream never affected me like that. What was the meaning of it all, I wonder? In My Name only. For My Glory only. What a strange message. And the church underneath. What a wonderful building it was."

He paused, and his heart beat faster than ever. He grasped the bed-post for support.

"I know now!" he cried. "I understand the meaning! It was a message of reproof from the Lord Himself. I was planning to build the church for my own satisfaction and for my own glory. But I was wrong. I see it now! I see it now! Thank God, my eyes are open at last!"

He dressed, went out of doors, and walked up and down the drive-way at the back of the house. The fresh balmy air cooled his hot forehead. But it did not lessen the burning of the fire in his heart. The stillness of the night, and the great starry vault overhead impressed him deeply. The presence he had felt in the room seemed to be still surrounding him. He understood the meaning of the vision now, and it had been vouchsafed for his guidance. He had been working along wrong lines in the past, but henceforth it would be in His Name and for His Glory

alone. Only in that spirit would he build the church.

As he thought of this in his rapid pacing, the principle gradually expanded. There was more than the church to be considered. He must include his dealing with others, especially Ned Preston and Bill Tooke. He had spared them both, the former for Helen's sake chiefly, and the latter because of a little child. But his motive should have been higher and nobler than that. "In My Name only. For My Glory only." Again the words came to him, and there in the darkness he bowed his head, and breathed a prayer for help to follow the message he had received. And with the prayer came a new strength and inspiration such as he had never known before. When he went back again into the house he felt like a man from which a heavy burden had been suddenly removed, and in its stead was a wonderful sustaining power.

Nathan went to the city on the early morning boat. He had much to do, and little time in which to do it. He visited Mr. Black, and outlined his plans as briefly and concisely as possible. The lawyer was greatly interested, and told him that there would be no trouble about the money, even though the Halton estate would not be settled until next year.

"You are a remarkable man, Mr. Strong," he said, "and I admire you for your noble resolve. How people will honor you for doing such a work."

"I am not going to do it for my own glory, Mr. Black. I see things in a different light now. It is for the glory and honor of Another I am going to build that church. I have been on the wrong track too long. When I came out of the Penitentiary the spirit of revenge was strong within me. I intended

to find the guilty ones and have them punished. But when at last I found the real criminal, I changed my mind, took a different course and forced him to make some restitution. I did it merely because it would benefit the ones he had injured, protect his wife and children, and also a punishment to himself."

"That was far greater revenge, Mr. Strong, and nobler in every way. It was better than brute revenge."

"Yes, I suppose so. But even then I did not go far enough, as it was not the true revenge as set forth by the Master Himself."

"And what is that?"

"Forgiveness. That is the Master Revenge, and I pray God that I may be able to forgive Ned Preston for what he has done to me. Henceforth that shall be my ruling spirit in all I undertake and do."

Nathan spoke these words very quietly, but with great emphasis. The lawyer looked into his client's eyes and then sighed.

"I believe you mean what you say, Mr. Strong, and I wish that I could feel the same as you do. If we could only put into practice such a principle as that, what a difference it would make to the world. But on the other hand, think how many rogues there are who would take a mean advantage of us. A noted man once said, 'Let me remember, when I find myself inclined to pity a criminal, that there is likewise a pity due to the country.' Yes, the Master Revenge might work out satisfactorily in an ideal Christian age, but I have serious doubts about applying it now."

"That is just the trouble, Mr. Black. It has not been fully tried, as people are afraid to put it into

effect. But I have the courage of my conviction, and am going to test it, anyway. So far, I have met with no success, but I have not gone far enough."

When Nathan left the lawyer he went at once to a prominent architect and spent over an hour with him, stating just what he needed in the way of church plans. He then visited the Stairs, and found that they were getting along very well.

"Henry has a good job now," Mrs. Stairs informed him," and we are quite happy. But we can never thank you enough for what you have done for us. The Lord will surely reward you."

"You need not thank me, Mrs. Stairs," Nathan replied. "I only did what I believed was right. I guess there was Another Who had a hand in this. We can truly thank Him for the outcome of it all."

"We do, sir, every day of our lives. It was the Lord alone Who cured our child when the doctors had given up all hope."

After a busy day in the city, Nathan was glad to turn his face once more homeward. He had many things to think about, so he needed the quietness of his own house. As he left the steamer and stepped upon the wharf, several neighbors spoke to him in an unusually friendly manner. This was different from their silent attitude toward him that morning, and he wondered what had caused the change. As he walked up to the main road, he saw several men reading a paper tacked to the store door. He knew that notices of sales and entertainments were always placed there, and in such things he was not interested. This was merely another, so he thought; the people's local bulletin, informing them what was about to take place in the parish.

When he reached home, he prepared and ate his supper. He next went out upon the verandah and smoked for some time. His mind was busy with his plans, and he was eager to begin work as soon as possible. But he had to see the Parson first, and obtain his permission to go ahead with the building. He was quite sure that the clergyman would be much pleased, and would give a ready consent. He longed, also, to see Helen that he might talk it all over with her, and receive any suggestions she might have to offer. He was happier this evening than he had been for a long time, and he felt like shouting aloud with joy.

As a relief to his feelings, he went into his workshop, and busied himself with a rustic chair which was partly completed. He had not spent much time here of late, so it was good to be back again, and he hummed a song as he shaped the various pieces of wood and fitted them into their proper places. In a few days he would be so busy upon the church that he would have no time for anything else.

And as he worked, he heard approaching footsteps, and the next minute Bill Tooke stood in the doorway. Nathan gave a start of surprise at seeing this unusual and unexpected caller. He merely bade him good-evening, and went on with his work. Bill entered, sat down upon a box, and watched him intently.

"Busy, eh?" he at length queried.

"Yes, I'm trying to do something to keep me out of mischief," Nathan replied.

"Nuthin' like it, I guess," and Bill gave a deep sigh. "Wish t'goodness I had the habit."

Nathan turned and looked keenly at his visitor. A

change had evidently come over the man, judging by his face and the expression in his eyes.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"Why, what makes ye think there is?"

"Oh, several things, but chiefly your coming to see me, of all men."

"No doubt ye do wonder at that. But, look here, I've done dirty by you, an' I ain't afraid to tell ye so. But I've decided to do different after this."

"Had a change of heart, Bill? Been to some revival meeting?" Nathan queried. He was not altogether sure of this man, thinking he might be acting in this manner with some special design in view.

"The only revival meetin' I've attended was the one held last night at my house," Bill explained. "You was the preacher, an' what you done had more effect on me than all the gospel-slingers I've ever heard."

"Well, that's interesting. What did I do to make such a remarkable change?"

"Ye saved me cow fer the baby's sake, that's what ye done. Now, I've been a reg'lar devil, in a way, an' don't deny it. But I'm fond of that kid; it has sich cute ways, an' I guess I think more of it than of all the rest. Then, when the constable came to take the cow, an' I thought how hard it would be on the baby to do without milk, there was murder in me heart. I saw red then more'n any time in me life, so if you hadn't happened along jist when ye did, I might have killed that man there an' then. It must have been the Lord that sent ye."

"It was the devil, I guess, from the way I was feeling," Nathan replied. "I went to your house to have it out with you for the lies you have been telling

about me. I intended to give you the biggest thrashing you ever got, and you deserve it, too."

"I know it, I know it," Bill hastily agreed. "I saw it in yer eyes when ye came into me house last night. But I didn't care then fer you or anyone else. I was ready to fight the hull d—— world fer the sake of the kid. But when ye acted as ye did, why, it took the starch right out of me, an' made me as limp as an eel; that's what ye done. What made ye do it, anyway, sir? Ye've keep me guessin' ever since."

"Something here," and Nathan placed his right hand over heart."

"Ah, heart-trouble, eh? Had it long?"

"Yes, heart-trouble," Nathan laughed in spite of himself. "It's something you have never been much bothered with, Bill, except, perhaps, when it comes to your baby. It's a peculiar disease, and one never knows just how and when it will affect him."

"Oh, I see," and Tooke's eyes opened wide with understanding. "It does make a man act queer sometimes, doesn't it? Why, I can't begin to tell ye how it's made me feel about that kid of mine. When I see the little cuss layin' in the cradle, with its blue eyes starin' up straight at me, an' listen to its squeaks, a funny feelin' hits me, an' then I allus want to do better."

"But the effect has not been very lasting, from all appearance, Bill," Nathan reminded.

"It hain't been in the past, sir, but, by G——, it will now. D'ye know what I done to-day about them lies I told?"

"No, I haven't heard anything."

"Ye haven't! Well, that's queer. Why, I wrote

out a notice, an' tacked it on the store door, statin' that what I said about you burnin' the church an' yer connection with Mrs. Preston, was a pack of lies. It's there now, an' I writ it meself, fer I'm purty good with the pen when once I git started."

A feeling of relief came into Nathan's heart as he listened to this confession. He now understood the meaning of the group that evening in front of the store. Then something else thrilled him. It was worth while, after all, to put into practice the Master's command about forgiving one's enemies. It had more effect than "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." He turned suddenly to his visitor.

"Say, Bill," he began, "this is great news to me. We have been enemies too long already. Let us henceforth be friends. Here's my hand on it."

"Sure thing," Bill exclaimed, as he reached out his big right grimy paw. "I'm only too glad to be a friend of sich a man as you. Yer as much ahead of Ned Preston as day is of night. Why, he's a snake, an' he's treated me dirty."

And there in that little workshop the two former enemies clasped hands. To both it meant a great deal, although one saw much more in it than the other. Nathan had tested the spirit of the Master Revenge, and it had not failed.

CHAPTER 27

What the World Needs

THE vision of the new church was constantly before Nathan during the remainder of the evening. He was anxious to receive the architect's plans that he might see what it looked like on paper. But nothing could ever surpass the picture he had beheld the previous night, and of which he had thought a great deal. And closely connected with the vision was the woman he loved. She seemed to be an integral part of the church of his fancy, permeating it with an indefinable grace and beauty. He knew that it was love which worked the mystic charm, and he was not ashamed to confess it to himself. Somewhere he had read that in olden days churches had been built to the sound of sweetest music, and he understood the meaning now. This new church he would erect to wonderful heart music, the harmony of love to his Master, and love for a noble woman. Such would be his continuing inspiration, and a secret which he would never divulge.

And mingled with all this was a deep sense of gratitude for the change that had evidently come over Bill Tooke. It had been so sudden that he could not for an instant doubt the divine guidance. The Master had overruled all things for good, and had turned his visit to Tooke's house into a marvellous victory. Nathan was well aware of the anger that had filled

his heart, and that the devil had driven him forth to wreak a brute revenge upon his enemy. But it must have been the Lord who defeated Satan and brought about the remarkable result. This thought gave him great comfort, and caused him to review his past life with all its strange vicissitudes. Perhaps, after all, they had been for the best, and his training in the school of affliction had been for some great purpose. He began to think that it was so, although there were some things he could not yet understand. He needed more light upon the mysteries surrounding his past career.

In the morning he went over to the church site and viewed the ruins. Nothing but ashes and charred timbers remained where once a fair building had stood. Formerly he would have compared the scene to his own life—a sad desolation of shattered hopes. But not so now. He saw things in a different light, and as he beheld a new and a better building in place of the old, so with his own broken life. From the wreck of each there would come forth something far grander and nobler in every way. Not in his own strength could this be accomplished, but through the power of Him he had taken as his Guide and Upholder.

That afternoon he visited the saw-mill up the road, and obtained the prices of the different kinds of lumber he would need. There was an abundance on hand for his purpose, so he returned home, his heart filled with peace and joy. He longed to see Helen that he might discuss his plans with her. He pictured her animated face as she listened to his words. Once during the evening he was strongly tempted to go to her. He might find her alone, and, perhaps, she would

be pleased to see him. He resisted this, however, and decided to await a more favorable opportunity.

The Parson was the only other person he wished to see, for without his consent he would not think of going ahead with the work. But he wished to have the architect's plans before speaking to the clergyman. By means of them he could explain his ideas far better than by mere words.

The next day the plans arrived by mail. Nathan could hardly wait until he reached home, so anxious was he to open the package and examine the contents. But when he saw the plans he was delighted. The architect had done the work quickly and well. Everything was just as Nathan had suggested, and he was most anxious to be off to show them to the Parson. But in this he was saved the trouble, for he was about through with his dinner when he heard the rumble of wheels upon the road. Looking out of the front window, he saw the clergyman jogging leisurely homeward. Hurrying to the door, he hailed him, and asked him to wait for a few minutes. The Parson looked surprised at Nathan's excited manner, and glanced curiously at the papers he was holding in his hand.

"What's all this about?" he inquired. "Is that a summons against me? One never knows what to expect next these days."

"It is a summons, sir," Nathan laughingly replied, "but nothing to cause you any worry. It's merely a summons to obtain your consent to a plan I have in my mind. Look, perhaps this will explain my meaning."

"Why, it's a church!" the clergyman exclaimed, peering down upon the drawings. "And those look to me like plans. What is this all about, anyway?"

"Simply, that I wish to build a new church, and these are the plans I have had drawn. But I do not want to do anything without your consent.

"But a church like that will cost more than we can afford," Mr. Westmore declared. "There was only a little insurance, and that will not go far."

"I know it will cost more than you can afford, sir, so that is why I wish to build it."

"You wish to build the church! But how can you do it without money?"

"I do not intend to try. It will certainly take money, so I am willing to go ahead if you will give your consent."

"Dear me! dear me! this is so sudden and startling, Mr. Stone. You have my consent, all right, but I am doubtful whether I should let you do it. Why should you spend so much money upon the church?"

"Because I have it to spend. It was left to me, so I wish to use some of it in a worthy cause."

The clergyman's eyes were misty as he fixed them intently upon Nathan's face. He was silent for a minute, lost in thought.

"I can hardly believe my senses," he murmured. "A new church! a new church! And you will build it! I must be surely dreaming. Nothing like this ever happened in this parish before."

"It is no dream, Mr. Westmore. I mean everything I have said. If you are willing to wait for a few months you will see what I shall do."

The clergyman impetuously reached out and seized Nathan's hand in a strong, firm grip.

"God bless you, sir," he said. "My heart is too full to express my thoughts. This is all wonderful!"

"And it will be more wonderful when you see the

church completed," Nathan replied. "I am very anxious to get to work at once. But you must go over these plans with me, as you may have some suggestions to make."

"Quite right, quite right, Mr. Stone. But suppose you come home with me now, and after dinner we can discuss the matter. My wife will be greatly pleased to see you."

"I have just finished my dinner," Nathan explained, "but I shall go with you, nevertheless. The sooner we get busy, the better it will be. Please wait until I get my coat and hat."

As the horse jogged along the road the two men talked most earnestly about the building of the church, and by the time the rectory was reached, the clergyman was well informed as to the undertaking.

"This has turned out to be a wonderful day for me," he quietly remarked, as he drew up the horse by the barn door. "How delighted my wife will be when she hears about your plans. She has been much worried over the loss of our church."

Mrs. Westmore was a bright, motherly-looking woman, who listened with intense astonishment as her husband related to her the good news. Tears of gratitude and joy came into her eyes as she stepped forward and took Nathan's hand in hers.

"We can never thank you enough for what you are planning to do," she said. "It will mean a new lease of life to both of us. I am sure the Lord has guided you, and it teaches us another lesson of faith. We should never again doubt His goodness."

Nathan was invited to join the worthy couple at dinner. But he asked to be excused, and requested that he might spend the time in the study, a glimpse

of which he had caught though an open door on the right of the hall.

"I am eager to look over your books," he told Mr. Westmore. "I hope you do not mind."

"Not at all, Mr. Stone. I am afraid, though, that you will not find much there to your liking. Most of my books are old, but they are all treasures to me, and friends of long years."

When once in the study, Nathan lost himself in examining the various volumes all neatly arranged on their shelves. There were commentaries, Church Histories, and other works of a theological and devotional nature. These he passed by, and turned his attention to essays and a few scientific books. Coming at length to a set of "The World's Best Classics," he chose at random one volume, settled himself in a big comfortable chair, and began to turn over the pages. In a few minutes he was deeply engrossed in one of Huxley's lectures, and had just finished when the Parson entered the room. The clergyman smiled when he saw what his guest was reading.

"A fine work, that," he remarked, sitting down by his side. "I am glad to know that you have discovered one of my treasures."

"A treasure it is, indeed," Nathan replied. "I must get this set, as it is a library in itself."

"Yes, and a choice selection from the masters, Mr. Stone. I often turn to them when wearied and depressed. In reading their noble thoughts and the mighty deeds of the past, I am always strengthened. They struggled, toiled and conquered, and have passed on to us an inspiration which we greatly need. I know that I need it, at any rate."

From books the conversation gradually turned to

the building of the church, and there in the quietness of that little room the two men discussed every detail of the architect's plans. When Nathan at length rose to go, he glanced around the room, and motioned to a picture on the wall above the Parson's writing-desk.

"I like that," he said. "I had a small print of it when I was in the Penitentiary, and it meant a great deal to me. It was given to me by a very beautiful young woman who once visited the place."

"Ah, yes, 'The Good Shepherd' is a favorite picture of mine," the clergyman replied. "When I see Him on that steep, rugged cliff reaching down and risking His own life to rescue that sheep, I am reminded that I must spare no efforts to do the same in my humble way. I am afraid, though, that I come far short, as there are so many sheep going astray in this very parish and I am not doing what I should to save them. But what impresses you most of all about that picture, Mr. Stone?"

"It is the love of the Master," Nathan replied in a low, earnest voice. "It was love alone which caused Him to come down to this world to save mankind. And it is only such love that can really uplift and save."

"I believe you are quite right, sir. The world needs love more than anything else to-day."

"More love and less law," Nathan fervently declared. "I have seen and experienced more than most men, and I believe that the majority of criminals were once not hopelessly bad at heart. If some of them had been treated differently, given another chance, for instance, they would have become good and reliable citizens. But when once the prison door closes upon them, they lose heart, knowing that they are

criminals in the eyes of the world, and that the blot can never be removed. They become hardened, and when they are at last free, they go from bad to worse."

"But that was not the way with you, Mr. Stone," the clergyman reminded.

"Perhaps not, but it might have been. You have no idea how near I came to being a criminal in reality for the rest of my life. I was an innocent man, charged with an offense I never committed. My heart was full of anger and rebellion against the world for the way I had been treated. But, thank God, I was led to see things in a different light. It was love alone which did it—love to my Great Master, and love for one of his fairest and noblest beings. More than that I cannot tell you without exposing the deep secret of my heart."

"I am grateful to you for telling me this much," Mr. Westmore replied. "I am thankful to know that you have escaped, and that love did it. Yes, I believe we need more love in the world to-day. You are practicing it, at any rate, Mr. Stone, and I admire you for it."

Nathan made no reply, but turned toward the window and looked out across the field sloping from the house down to the road. As he did so, he gave a start, for walking slowly up the driveway he saw Helen Preston. He did not wish to meet her just then, as he knew that he would feel embarrassed, and no doubt she would, too. The clergyman also saw her, and his face brightened.

"Here comes Mrs. Preston now," he said. "How delighted she will be when she hears the good news. You must meet her, Mr. Stone. Her visit is most timely."

"I would rather not meet her just now," Nathan emphatically declared. "You can tell her what you like, but I do not wish to be present. Let me out by the back door, please."

The clergyman was about to remonstrate with Nathan, and urge him to remain. He looked keenly at him and, seeing the anxious expression upon his face, he refrained.

"Do not think me ungrateful, sir," Nathan added, "but a jail-bird such as I am often has peculiar views about meeting people. You will do me a great favor if you let me slip quietly away."

Feeling certain that his visitor had some special reason for his request, the clergyman led him silently to the back door. As Nathan passed out, he seized him by the hand.

"I do not understand why you are afraid of a woman, Mr. Stone," he said. "It is none of my business, of course. But some day I hope you will meet Mrs. Preston, and when you do, you will meet one of the noblest women God ever made."

CHAPTER 28

Face to Face

AS NATHAN made his way up across the fields after he had left the Rectory, he meditated upon his conversation with the clergyman. He thought, too, of Helen, and knew that she would hear about the plans for the new church. He pictured to himself the expression of pleasure upon her face and the delight of interest in her eyes as she listened to the news. He wondered, too, what had become of Ned, and how he was enduring his agony of soul and mind.

Coming at length to the edge of the woods, he stepped upon an old lumber road. He believed that this led to the brook back in the hills, and was the one that Helen was in the habit of using. He decided to follow it and spend the rest of the day at the very place where he had met her and her two little ones.

Along the road he slowly moved, for he was in no hurry. He wished to have this quiet time alone, as to-morrow he would enter upon his new work, and there would be then little opportunity for rest and meditation. The old way was conducive to serious thought. In some places great trees lifted their stately forms, and through their branches the sun's rays sifted softly down upon the mossy ground. Birds chirped and twittered on all sides, while active squirrels scampered to and fro, at times scolding the intruder into their rightful domain. It was here that Helen had walked

on that bright afternoon, with her children dancing along by her side. What a joy it would be to have her with him now, and how many things they would have to talk about. It seemed almost sacred ground to him because she had been there. Perhaps she had been thinking of him on that day, recalling sweet memories of the past. He abandoned himself to the pleasure of such thoughts, even though he was well aware that she was the wife of another. But that was as far as he would go, so he told himself. She was his in spirit, he felt certain, and that was some consolation.

From the summit of the hill, which he at length reached, the road dipped to the brook. It was easier walking now and his steps quickened. The murmur of flowing water reached him as he advanced, and in a few minutes he caught sight of the stream as it wound its way like a silver thread through the forest. He found the very spot where he had met Helen, and here he sat down to rest. It was good to be in such a place, and idly he watched the brook before him. The water was low, in keeping with the dry season of the year. But he knew that in a few months, and perhaps sooner, that brook would be a raging torrent, full from bank to bank. It was just like his life, he mused; seasons of peace and rest, and again times of fierce, overwhelming passions when the heart was greatly stirred. Such had been his experience. Now it was summer, with the terrible storms over, for a time, at least.

Gradually his mind turned to the years he had spent in the Penitentiary with all the brightness of nature shut out. And there were thousands of people to-day leading the same life. Some deserved their fate, he well knew, and had to be punished for their offenses.

Such treatment did not lessen evil, but increased it, and made people hard and indifferent to suffering. He thought of Ned Preston, and although the man deserved severe punishment, what would have been accomplished had he been sent to the Penitentiary? No restitution would have been made for the wrongs he had done. It would have brought misery upon his family, while he himself would have become more brutal and degraded. He knew from men he had met just what such treatment meant.

He was aroused from his reverie by the sound of footsteps, and glancing down the brook, he saw a man slowly approaching, carrying a fishing-rod in his hand, although he was not fishing. At once he recognized the very man of whom he was thinking. It was unusual for Ned to be in such a place, and Nathan wondered what had brought him here to-day. Fishing was evidently not his object. He was somewhat annoyed that the man he least desired to see had come to disturb his quietness. In fact, he did not wish to meet him at all. And yet he was not going away. Would Ned speak to him? and if so, what would he have to say?

And all the time Preston was drawing nearer, and when but a few yards away he looked up and saw Nathan lying upon the bank. He started, and his haggard face flushed with anger when he beheld his enemy. For a few seconds the two stared silently at each other, one with the calmness of a clear conscience and complete self-possession; the other, restless and uneasy, his eyes ablaze with defiance.

"So this is how you spend your valuable time, eh?" Preston at last queried.

"I couldn't spend it in a much better way, Ned,"

Nathan replied. "It's a very nice place here, and I am sorry that you have disturbed me."

"Don't lie to me," Preston roared, stepping quickly forward. "You've been spying upon me; that's what you've been doing."

"What makes you think so, Ned?" Do I look like a spy? Or is it your own guilty conscience that's troubling you?"

"Conscience! conscience! How I hate that word. Why, it's driving me mad. It's hell within me. Why did the Lord ever devise such a diabolical thing as conscience?"

Nathan was surprised at this confession, and he looked keenly into Preston's eyes. The angry light of defiance had disappeared, and in its stead was an expression of unutterable anguish and despair. He could not help feeling sorry for this wretched man, and his heart softened a little toward him.

"Perhaps the Lord is trying to make a better man of you, Ned," he suggested, "and only through a troubled conscience can He succeed. Have you thought of that?"

"I have thought of everything, but it is no use. Ever since that day I nearly shot you I have had no peace. I've been like a fugitive fleeing from justice. Oh, it's terrible! terrible!"

"You brought it upon yourself, though," Nathan reminded. "Think how I suffered for long years in the Penitentiary."

"But you had a clear conscience, Nathan. You were innocent. But with me—O Lord!"

Preston flung himself upon the ground and gazed moodily at the brook. The sparkling water and the

glory of the day had no charm for him. To a tortured soul nature appeals in vain.

"Ned." Nathan spoke sharply, causing the unhappy man to turn and look at him. "My conscience was clear, no doubt, when I was in the Penitentiary. But do you think I was happy? Far from it. For a long time the anger and rebellion that filled my heart drove out everything else. My one great desire was to be free that I might find the guilty ones and wreak a terrible revenge. I shudder now when I think of what I might have done had I obtained my freedom then."

"What made the change?" Preston asked, his curiosity a little aroused.

"There were several things, Ned. But the most important was the teaching I had received in childhood from my parents. When my soul was in the blackest depths of despair, and I was cursing God and man alike, I happened to open a copy of the Great Book I had with me in my cell. I began to read in order to repudiate the sayings of the Master, and to prove by the way I had been treated that His words were wrong. But as I read, my eyes were opened, and as His wonderful messages of promise were unfolded to me, I saw things in a different light. I read how He was scorned and rejected by men, and that His sufferings were far worse than mine. That was the beginning of the change which came over me, and it brought a great peace into my soul."

"Bah!" Preston retorted. "That's all bosh. I've heard all that before from canting preachers, and don't believe a word of it. Religion is all nonsense."

"It's because you have never tried it, Ned. But for the grace of God in my heart, do you think I would

be sitting here talking to you in this quiet way? Why, I would have killed you when I found out what you had done to me, or I should have had you placed in the Penitentiary. It's because your heart is bad, and you have done what is wrong that you are so wretched now. Don't blame religion for your own evil deeds."

"Why, you talk just like the Parson, Nathan. You've missed your calling. You should be a preacher."

"I might do far worse, Ned. But I am merely a carpenter, an ordinary repairer, and expect to be so to the end of my life. If I can do some good that way, it is all I ask."

"And build a new church, so I hear. That's going the limit."

"Yes, that's what I am planning to do. But you should be the last person to sneer at such a work as that."

"Why?"

"Because you destroyed the old church."

With a muttered oath Preston sprang to his feet, and faced his accuser.

"How dare you say such a thing as that?" he demanded. "What right have you to say that I destroyed the church?"

"Keep cool, Ned, and don't get so excited. You know very well that you did it. You wished to be revenged upon the Lord, and set His House on fire out of spite. You can't deny it."

"B-but, how do you know all this?" Preston stammered. His face was very white now, and his body was shaking.

"Oh, never mind how I know! But it is true, and when you expected to gloat over the deed, you went

nearly crazy when the cross fell to the ground. Isn't that so?"

"Good heavens! are you a man or a devil?" Preston exclaimed in amazement, shrinking back as if from a blow. "How did not find out all about this?"

"It doesn't matter, Ned, how I found out. But it is true, nevertheless. In your wild rage at your troubled conscience, you turned your hand against the church, the symbol of the Lord's presence in this parish. You defied Him by destroying His House. But the outcome has been altogether different from what you expected. That charred, fallen cross filled your superstitious heart with a terrible and nameless fear, and you grovelled before it like a man bereft of his senses."

"And you knew of all this, yet didn't expose me! My! what a chance for revenge."

"What kind of revenge, Ned?"

"To have me arrested, of course. It's a wonder you didn't do it. Why?"

"You deserved it, no doubt. But that would have been only brute revenge. There is a greater revenge than that, the revenge of forgiveness. As for punishment, you are getting all that you can stand now, and from outward appearance, nothing could be more terrible."

Preston looked at Nathan, and slowly the meaning of it all dawned upon his mind. He placed his right hand to his forehead in an abstracted manner.

"And is that why you spared me?" he gasped.

"Partly, Ned. At first I did it because I wanted you to make all the restitution you could for the wrongs you had committed, and for Helen's sake."

"Ah! I see. I understand now. You love her; that's it."

"I do, Ned, and you knew that I loved her when you took her from me. You lied to her, and forged my name to a letter you sent her. Oh, I know all about it."

Nathan rose suddenly to his feet as the past swept strongly upon him. He could easily control himself when speaking about other wrongs he had suffered. But when it came to Helen, it was difficult for him to remain calm. And this Preston noted.

"Helen never loved me," he muttered.

"But she's been a true wife to you, Ned, and a good mother to your children. You can't deny that."

"I don't. But she never loved me."

"Did you ever give her any chance to do so? Why, almost any other woman would have left you long ago. It's a wonder to me that Helen didn't."

"She loves you, Nathan, more than she does me. I know it, and that makes me mad. You're her style, I guess, fond of religion, going to church, and such stuff. Why, she'd rather spend the day at the Rectory with old Parson Westmore and his wife than with me."

"And for a mighty good reason, Ned. But, there, we've talked enough. I have told you some plain things to-day, but it's no use. I did hope that you might see the error of your ways and change your course of living. But you are just the same as ever. My fond hopes are doomed."

Nathan was becoming afraid of himself. To have Preston so near, and to see the pettiness and wretchedness of his soul was most disgusting. The stuff of which true manhood is made did not seem to be in

the fellow. It was strange that he had even a conscience to trouble him. He was about to walk away, when he turned suddenly around.

"If you are a man, Ned, why don't you square yourself with the world?"

"In what way?"

"Make a full confession of what you did to me. Am I to bear your guilt for the rest of my life? In justice to me why don't you do it, as well as for your own honor?"

"Oh, I couldn't think of doing such a thing. It would ruin me."

"Or in other words, Ned, you are a coward, and a most contemptible one, at that."

Nathan stood for a minute looking keenly at the unhappy man's downcast face. Then, receiving no reply, he walked rapidly away down along the bank of the brook.

CHAPTER 29

As a Man Soweth

THE following days were busy ones for Nathan. He plunged into his new undertaking with great enthusiasm, and inspired with zeal all who worked with him. Peter Martin was the first to offer his assistance in hauling lumber from the mill. He did it freely, refusing to be placed on the pay-roll.

"After the blessin's I've received, me conscience wouldn't give me any peace if I took pay," he declared. "An', besides, it's my Father's House an' mine I'm helpin' to build, so why should I take money fer doin' sich a thing?"

He had just arrived with another load, and had drawn up his team on the church grounds as he uttered these words. Nathan was standing by his side, his notebook and pencil in his hands, ready to enter his name. He smiled as he slipped them back again into his pocket.

"It is good of you, Mr. Martin, to consider this as a duty," he replied. "It will help a great deal."

"Not as a duty, Mr. Stone," Peter corrected. "It's because I love to do it. D'ye think my wife an' me ever think of duty when we look after our home an' care fer our little ones? Not a bit of it. It's love, an' nuthin' else. Ye never think of duty when yer heart's filled with love."

Nathan looked at his neighbor's bronzed, rugged

face, his honest gray eyes, and a great respect for him came into his heart. Notwithstanding his simple humble life, Peter was truly a noble man, for he comprehended that real service is love and not duty alone.

"I am glad that you look upon it in such a light as that, Mr. Martin," he said. "It makes a wonderful difference when we work for love and not mere duty."

"Indeed it does, sir. An' I'm not the only one. There's Fletcher, fer instance. He's goin' to begin haulin' to-morrow. He's never fergotten what ye did fer him, an' the cross ye made an' put upon the grave of his little child. An' there are others, too."

He ceased and looked over to where several men were clearing away the rubbish for the foundation of the new church.

"Now, jist look there at Bill Tooke," he continued in a low voice. "I kin hardly believe me eyes. If anybody had told me a week ago that he'd be doin' an honest day's work, an' at the church, of all places, I would have called him a fool. But there he is, diggin' away fer all he's worth. An' he seems to enjoy it, too. Wonders will never cease."

"Bill was the first man to apply for work," Nathan explained. "So far, he's been doing very well. I hope he will last. It may make a new man of him."

"It will, it will, Mr. Stone," Peter declared, as he scrambled to the ground, and began to unfasten the chain which bound his load. "Why, he's a different man already, an' it's due to you, sir, fer what you done fer him."

The entire parish was intensely stirred by the building of the new church, and the praise of Nathan was on the lips of all. He heard nothing, however, of what they were saying, but went on steadily with

his work, directing and supervising everything. He made several trips to the city to order window frames, doors, mouldings and other material needed. All this kept him very busy, and he was happier than he had been for years. As the building rose from the ground, took shape and stood forth in graceful outlines among its setting of verdant trees, his heart was filled with joy and gratitude. His dream was at last coming true.

Many were the visitors who came to view the work, for word of what was being done had extended far beyond the parish. All were enthusiastic at what they beheld, and heartily congratulated Nathan. But he needed none of their praise, for the peace and satisfaction of his own heart were reward enough. He was working not for the approbation of men, but for the glory of his Great Master.

But of all who came, the Parson was the most interested. Not a day passed that he was not there, and sometimes more often. To him it seemed almost too good to be true. He would stand and watch the men as they worked, and more than once his eyes grew misty as he gazed upon the structure.

"What a day it will be in the parish when the Bishop comes to consecrate the church," he one day remarked to Nathan. "When do you suppose it will be ready? The hall where we are now holding service is overcrowded every Sunday. I am anxious to be once more in a building set apart for worship."

"I hope the church will be ready early next summer," Nathan replied. "We are working hard to get the outside finished before the cold weather arrives. We can work all winter at the interior, for I have al-

ready ordered the stoves, so the building will be comfortable."

"I am rejoiced to hear this, Mr. Stone. It will also please Mrs. Preston, for she asks so often about it. She takes a great interest in the work, and I have to report to her every day. It gives her much joy, and, poor woman she needs it, as she has many burdens to bear these days."

"Why, what's the matter now?" Nathan asked.

"It's her husband again. He has been very strange of late, and sometimes I fear he is mentally unbalanced. He eats little, so I understand, and is but a shadow of his former self. I do not know the cause of it all. Perhaps he has overworked his brain with his business affairs. Anyway, he is a great trial to his wife. And, by the way, she has offered to give a new organ for the church, 'In memory,' so she said."

"In memory of whom, Mr. Westmore?" Nathan inquired, much interested. "Of her parents?"

"I do not know. She merely said 'In memory of the past,' whatever she means by that. I have thought over these words, and they puzzle me. If she had mentioned her parents in connection with the past, it would be quite clear. But she never said a word about them. It must refer to some incident in her past life. Anyway, she offered no explanation, and I did not care to question her."

Nathan's heart quickened as he listened to the clergyman's words. Could it be possible that Helen wished to present the organ in memory of those happy days when they were so much together? Did she so cherish their love? It could mean nothing else, he felt certain.

He thought much about this during the days and

weeks that followed. Although he seldom saw Helen now, the idea that she was thinking of him and his work was a great inspiration. He mused over this during the evenings as he sat with book in hand before his fire, for the late September nights were cool. The church was now completely enclosed, shingled, the windows all in, and the stoves set up. He could thus rest with a contented mind, knowing that no matter how rough or severe the weather, he could work upon the interior.

He was sitting thus quite late one stormy night, reading a book he had purchased the last time he was in the city. He had seen favorable notice of it in a recent paper, and decided to obtain it at the first opportunity. It was David Grayson's "Adventures in Contentment," and as he read, he lost himself in the pages, and unheeded the time as it slipped by. Here was a writer who appealed to his own soul. He had been confined like himself, although in a different kind of prison, which the world calls "office," and when he was at last free he revelled in his new adventures upon his farm. From the opening chapter, "The Valley of Vision," he read on to "The Marsh Ditch." How delightful this was, where the author relates about digging a ditch on his farm by the sweat of his brow. He revels in the sounds he hears, the things he sees, and the invigorating odor of the fresh, upturned earth.

"Often as I work," Grayson says, "I stop to see; really see: see everything, or to listen; and it is the wonder of wonders how much there is in this old world which we never dreamed of, how many beautiful, curious, interesting sights and sounds there are which ordinarily make no impression upon our overfed and pre-occupied minds."

Several times Nathan read these words, and then laid the book upon the table by his side. The rain beating against the window, and the kettle humming upon the stove sounded like music to his ears. It was good to be in such a cosy place on such a night. How Grayson must have enjoyed his quiet farm. He would like to meet the man who found such pleasure in his common occupations.

The storm increased in fury as he sat there, and the windows rattled. The house shook at times, although it was partly protected by trees. In the midst of a more violent gust than ever, a heavy knock sounded upon the kitchen door. Wondering who could be calling on such a night, Nathan hastily rose, opened the door and peered out into the blackness. For a few seconds he could see nothing. Then the dripping form of Parson Westmore appeared before him, his face and beard wet with rain. In one hand he was holding the reins, trying to restrain his restive horse.

"Quiet, Jerry," he ordered, turning to the animal. "What's the matter with you, anyway? It's the storm, Mr. Stone," he explained. "And no wonder, for this is a wild night."

"What brings you here, then?" Nathan asked. "Is anything the matter?"

"Yes. Mr. Preston is very ill, and keeps calling almost incessantly for you. He starts up in bed at every sound and asks if you are there. Nothing else will satisfy him. Will you go with me? Mrs. Preston will be most grateful if you will."

"Certainly I shall go, Mr. Westmore," Nathan assured. "Just wait a minute and I shall be with you."

On the way the clergyman explained how Preston

had been found by a neighbor lying by the side of a backland road, in a very weak condition. He had caught a severe cold and owing to his run-down condition the doctor was afraid that he would not survive.

"He is in a very bad shape, now," Mr. Westmore continued, "and is quite flighty. Sometimes he doesn't even know his wife. He raves a great deal, and has peculiar notions about missing bonds, and he often mentions your name. The mind is a strange thing when deranged, isn't it, Mr. Stone?"

"When was he found on the road?" Nathan asked, unheeding the question.

"Night before last. Mrs. Preston sent for me, and I went at once for the doctor. A trained nurse is coming from the city in the morning. Poor Mrs. Preston is almost worn out with anxiety and lack of sleep. She must get some rest."

It did not take them long to reach the Preston house, and while the clergyman drove home to stable his horse, Nathan entered by the front door without knocking. Helen, who had been awaiting his coming, met him, and without a word she held out her hand. As Nathan grasped it, he noticed how white and strained was her face, although her eyes were unusually bright. She seemed so frail standing there, that he longed to place his arms around her for support. To him she resembled some angelic being, so quiet and dignified was her manner, her dark hair forming a striking contrast to her white face.

"I am glad you are here, Nathan," she told him. "It is good of you to come on such a night as this."

"I am thankful that I am needed, Helen. Ned is very bad, so the Parson said."

"I believe so. But, lay aside your coat and come

upstairs. You can hear him calling for you. He may not know you, but it is comforting to have you here."

Nathan detected the note of relief in her voice, and it thrilled him. It meant much to be by the side of Helen when she needed him.

In another minute they were at the bedroom door, and as Nathan looked in he was startled by the appearance of the man lying upon the bed. He could hardly believe that it was Ned Preston, his unshaven face and wild eyes giving him a ferocious expression. He was beating the air with his hands, as if trying to ward off some imaginary enemy. His head kept moving incessantly upon the pillow, and the perspiration stood out in beads upon his forehead.

"Nathan, Nathan, where are the bonds?" he asked "I can't find them. Yes, there they are. Look, over there in that box. Ah, I've got them!" he cried as his hands clutched the air. He emitted an insane chuckle which was hard for the watchers to endure.

"I can't stand this!" Helen moaned. "It is terrible!"

"Suppose you go downstairs, and leave me with Ned," Nathan suggested.

"No, no, I must remain here. It is my duty. Look!"

Nathan turned quickly and saw that Preston had lifted his head and shoulders from the pillow, and was staring straight before him.

"You'll never get me!" he cried. "I'll die first! I won't go, I tell you! Take your hands off me. Oh! Oh!"

Quickly Nathan stepped to his side, and as gently

as possible forced him back upon the pillow. He then placed his hand upon the unhappy man's forehead.

"There, there, Ned, nobody is going to take you," he soothed. "We won't let anyone harm you."

The words and the cool touch calmed Preston for a few minutes. He remained still as if trying to comprehend something.

"Where is Nathan?" he asked. "I want Nathan. He won't let them take me. Nathan! Nathan!" he shrieked. "Save me! Save me!" Don't let them get me!'

With a stifled moan, Helen left the room, and Nathan was alone with the demented man. He spoke to Preston, telling him that he was near, and that no one would get him. This, however, made no difference, so Nathan sat down by the bed while Ned continued his ravings. He was living over again his past life of infamy, and with all pretenses removed, he was exposing to the very one he had deeply wronged the terrors which had been haunting him. There was hardly anything that he did not mention, from the stolen bonds to the burning of the church, and Nathan was thankful that Helen was not present to hear all that he said. Twice she came into the room, but as there was nothing she could do, she obeyed Nathan's request that she should let him keep watch.

"You lie down and get some rest," he advised. "One is enough here, and I will call you if necessary."

"But I cannot sleep, Nathan. It is impossible with Ned raving like this."

"Lie down, anyway. You may be able to get a little rest."

Nathan spoke quietly, but his heart was beating fast. How strange it seemed that he should be so

near Helen, in her own house, telling her what to do. That she was depending upon him now, gave him considerable satisfaction. Oh, if he could be always with her, to help and protect her! He thought of all this after she had left the room. What a dismal failure had been her life, and it was all due to the man lying upon the bed. What trouble Ned had caused both of them. Little did he ever imagine during those terrible prison days of impotent rage and despair, that the one responsible for his imprisonment would be so near and in such a helpless condition. But as Ned had sown, so was he now reaping. The wheel had turned completely around, and punishment in a most terrible form had come at last. He often shuddered as he listened to the ravings of the wretched man. Far better a life-time imprisonment with a clear conscience than such tortures as Ned was undergoing.

About midnight he went downstairs for a brief respite. He glanced into the sitting-room where a light was dimly burning. And there he saw Helen lying upon a sofa, fast asleep. Only for a few seconds was he constrained to watch her. How beautiful she looked to him, and the impression lingered in his mind as he returned slowly upstairs. He stopped at the landing to look at several pictures upon the walls. One, especially, attracted his attention. It was Watts's "Hope," of which Nathan was very fond. As he looked at the blindfolded woman seated upon the world, with her head bent low to catch the faint sound from the one unbroken string of the lyre she was grasping in her left hand, he wondered if Helen had hung the picture there. He imagined her standing before it. Had it inspired her in times of darkness

and distress? Did she find in it the story of her own life?

For some time he remained there, his mind busy with many thoughts. He then went back into the bedroom, and took up again his solitary watch by the side of the restless man.

CHAPTER 30

The Completed Revenge

WHEN the nurse arrived from the city, Nathan went home, knowing that he was no longer needed that day. He was tired, but he thought little about that, for Helen's thanks thrilled his entire being. She had accompanied him to the door and told him how grateful she was for his kindness. He had tried to say something in reply, to speak words of encouragement. But he felt that he had miserably failed, although he believed that Helen understood his meaning by the look in her eyes.

Several times during the week he went to inquire after Ned, and learned that he was slowly improving. When at last Preston came to himself, and one day heard Nathan's voice downstairs, he asked to see him. As the visitor entered the room, the invalid tried to rise from the bed.

"What are you doing in my house?" he demanded in an angry voice.

"I have come to find out how you are getting along, of course," Nathan replied.

"Then, you can save yourself the trouble after this. How dare you come here? Get out of my house at once."

Knowing that further talk would be useless, Nathan left the excited man and went downstairs. There he met Helen, her face very white.

"Oh, don't mind Ned," she whispered. "He does not fully realise what he has said. He has insulted you, and I am so sorry."

"Do not let this worry you, Helen," Nathan replied. "I understand."

"But you will come back, Nathan?"

"I will if you want me."

"Certainly I want you." Helen's voice was low, and her eyes were misty. She held out her hand. "Good-by now. I must go back to Ned."

During the following days Nathan kept steadily at his work upon the church. But his thoughts turned often to the house down the road. He learned from Mr. Westmore that Ned was improving, and as soon as he was able to be around the family would return to the city. This was disturbing news to him, for then Helen would be much farther away. He saw her again at service in the hall. He met her as she was leaving the building.

"We are going away this week," she informed him. "Ned is much better, and is anxious to leave the country."

"Is he as restless as ever?" Nathan asked.

"He is just the same; seldom talks, and takes very little interest in anything. Sometimes I fear that his mind is affected. You will come to see us in the city, will you not, Nathan?"

"I am not sure about that, Helen. It would only make Ned angry, so, perhaps, I had better stay away."

Nathan never forgot the startled look that Helen gave him, and her faltering "good-by." He thought of them as he walked slowly homeward. He needed no words to tell of the agony of her soul, and what it meant for her to return to the city with her husband

in such a condition. She was made for brightness and joy. But instead, her whole married life had been a lonely struggle, a constant misery and gloom. The idea that she needed him, and that he could do so little for her, was hard to endure. At times there swept upon him the great temptation which had come to him before. Why not speak to her, tell of his love, and urge her to flee with him to some distant country? He crushed back this longing, as he had done in the past, and chided himself for even thinking about such a thing. Helen would never consent, he felt certain, and, besides, it would not be right. She was another man's wife, and so long as she was bound to Ned, she must remain by his side. He would wait, and let events shape themselves. All things would come out right at last, so he believed, if he could only be patient.

The weeks slipped rapidly by, and so engrossed was Nathan in his work that Christmas season was upon him almost before he was aware of it. He had made several business trips to the city, but had not seen Helen. He longed to go to her, to hear her voice, to look upon her face, to find out how she was getting along. But he did not go, knowing that Ned would be away from home. That would be too much like a sneak and a coward.

The day before Christmas was cold. For some time he had been turning over in his mind what he might do in the way of Christmas cheer for some of the children in the parish. At last his mind was made up, so visiting the store, he gave orders for nuts, candy, and such toys as the store contained. These were to be sent to a number of little ones, including the Watters and the Martin children. His gifts to the

Tooke family were larger, consisting principally of a liberal supply of provisions. Bill was now deserving of such help. He had worked faithfully and well at the church, and never once had he shown the least desire to return to his former manner of living.

Christmas Eve shut down cold and dismal. A wind from the north east raced over the land, and the telephone wires along the road hummed their weird prelude of an approaching storm. Nathan placed a couple of hardwood sticks in his heater and settled himself back in his easy chair for a pleasant evening's reading. That day the Parson had presented him with a set of "The World's Best Classics," and he was eager to sample the contents. He chose one of the volumes and began to read. He turned on purpose to Dickens' "Christmas Carol," and read it through. He then laid the book aside, as memories of the past swept upon him. He was a child again in his old home, with his parents, brothers and one sister there. He recalled the happy faces and the joy that prevailed. Now they were all gone and he alone was left, and a jail-bird, at that. He stirred, as a violent guest of wind shook the house and rattled the windows. It was pleasant to be in his comfortable room on such a wild night, even though alone. If only he had Helen by his side, his happiness would be complete. He wondered what she was doing this night. Perhaps she was preparing the Christmas presents for her little ones. How he would like to be there to help, or, at least, to watch the animated expression upon her face. But what was Ned doing? Most likely he was away carousing with some of his boon companions. The thought brought an angry gleam into Nathan's eyes and caused him to clench his hands firmly together.

"The brute!" he muttered. "Perhaps I have made a mistake in dealing with Ned. The Penitentiary is the best place for him. And, yet——"

He ceased abruptly as Preston's words and actions since the burning of the church came to his mind. The man puzzled him. He sighed and reached out for the book he had laid upon the table, when a loud rap sounded upon the door. Wondering who could be visiting him on such a night, he rose to his feet, threw open the door and looked out. And there he saw Peter Martin, holding something in his hand.

"Come in, Mr. Martin," he invited. "I am glad to see you."

"I can't stay, sir," Peter replied. "This is Christmas Eve, so I must git home at once. I've jist come from the store, an' was asked to give ye this phone message. It's from the city. Good-night, sir, an' a happy Christmas."

Before Nathan could thank him, Peter was gone. Closing the door, Nathan tore open the envelope. Whom could it be from? he asked himself, as he drew forth the paper, and unfolded it.

"Ned died suddenly in his office to-day. Come quick. I want you.

"Helen."

That was all, and for a few seconds Nathan stood staring at the message. He then dropped into his chair, trembling violently. "Ned died suddenly in his office to-day. Come quick. I want you." The words pounded through his brain. So Helen had turned to him! He must go to her at once. But how could he get there? He rose from his chair, opened the door once more and stepped out. The blackness lifted up itself against him like a wall and he could feel

the snow upon his face. But it mattered little to him what the night was like. Helen had sent for him, and that was sufficient. There was no one to whom he could now turn for assistance. Peter Martin had two horses, but they were so slow that it would take them a long time to reach the railway station ten miles away. And, besides, he did not wish to ask his worthy neighbor to leave home on Christmas Eve. He, accordingly, decided to walk, feeling certain that he could do it in time to catch the midnight express.

Going back into the house, he was not long in preparing himself for the journey. With a glance at the stove, to see that all was safe, he seized his lighted lantern and started forth. The wind swept upon him as he reached the highway, but as it was in his back, it proved an assistance instead of a hindrance. The snow, thicker now, swirled about his body and flung itself across the road. But the light of the lantern guided his steps and rapidly he sped onward. A sense of exhilaration possessed him. He was on his way to Helen. She needed him and had sent for him. Passing the Preston house, he glanced in its direction, but all was in darkness there. Never again would Ned visit the place which his ill-gotten money had purchased. He had lived a fast, reckless life, and was considered a keen business man. The world knew nothing about his past deed of infamy, and no doubt the papers would now laud him to the skies. He had escaped earthly punishment, but not the stern avenger within him. And the end had come in an instant while in his office, and he had made not the slightest effort to clear the name of the man he had so grievously injured. Now it was too late, for Nathan was determined that no word of his should ever

reveal the deed. He would let it rest and bear the disgrace to the grave. Helen knew, and so did Mr. Black, the lawyer. But neither would divulge the secret without his consent, he felt sure.

Such was the burden of his thoughts as he plodded steadily forward. The storm increased in fury, and the travelling became more difficult. At times he was protected by stretches of woods, and here he obtained a much needed respite from the fierceness of the wind. But when he again passed into the bleak open country, he found it difficult to keep his lantern from being blown out. Often he was compelled to shelter it as much as possible beneath his coat. With the light thus dimmed, or hidden altogether, he found it almost impossible to follow the road, and several times he floundered off into the ditch. The snow was becoming deeper all the time, which made the travelling harder.

At length Nathan became very weary and longed to sit down by the side of the road to rest. But the thought of Helen awaiting his coming urged him forward. Lights from various houses along the way twinkled dimly through the storm. He knew that parents were busy preparing for Christmas morning, loading trees or filling little stockings. The storm did not affect them in their cosy homes, and they knew nothing of the lonely wayfarer plodding so wearily along the road. But Nathan thought of them, and visions rose before his mind of those scenes of quiet contentment.

The snow was steadily increasing in depth, and the wind seemed more intense in its fury. Step by step he struggled bravely onward. An hour passed, then two, and still he was several miles from the station. Then another hour, and midnight was drawing near.

He must catch that train. Helen must not be disappointed. Often he stumbled now, and several times the lantern almost dropped from his benumbed hand. This always sent a fear through his heart, and for a few minutes aroused him to renewed energy. This, however, soon passed, and he staggered on as before. Midnight came and still he battled with the fury surrounding him. He gave up all hope of reaching the station in time. He had only another half mile to go, but it seemed a great distance to him now. He shuffled his feet mechanically through the snow. He peered keenly ahead, and ere long saw the station light. This gave him new courage, for there he would find warmth and shelter, at any rate. But even as he looked, the shrill shriek of an engine sounded through the storm. It was the express, he well knew, and excitedly he dashed forward, and leaped upon the platform just as the blazing headlight of the belated train came into view around a bend in the track. In another minute the hissing snow-bedecked engine thundered past, and drew up its long train of cars in front of the station. Nathan scrambled on board with a number of other men, made his way into the smoking-room, and sank down exhausted upon one of the seats. Never was rest so sweet to any man nor the warmth more pleasant. And there he stayed, huddled in a corner seat rousing up only to pay his fare when the conductor made his appearance.

By the time the train reached the city Nathan was a little rested. Notwithstanding the storm and the lateness of the train there were coaches at the station, so, boarding one, he was driven to his destination. When he reached the Preston house, he stepped out, paid the coachman and walked up the steps. His

hand was raised to ring the bell, but ere he could press the button, the door opened and Helen stood before him.

"I knew you would come," she quietly said, as she closed the door and held out her hand. "It is good of you, and on such a night! But, oh! how tired you look," she added, observing Nathan's weary face. "Let me help you off with your coat."

But Nathan held her hand in his and looked longingly into her eyes. He wanted to speak, to express his sympathy, but words would not come. He knew that she was very tired, and her noble courage touched him. Slowly he released her hand, removed his hat and coat and followed her into a cosy room, where a fire was burning brightly in the grate. Then side by side before the glowing coals Helen told him the brief story of her husband's death.

"The shock was terrible," she said. "Ned had spent the day at his office, and did not come home to dinner. During the evening, while I was reading here to the children, the news came. The janitor making his rounds, found Ned dead at his desk. It was heart trouble, so the doctor decided."

"I am glad you sent for me, Helen," Nathan replied. "But I am afraid there is little that I can do."

"There is a great deal, Nathan. It is something very important, and that is why I sent for you. It is in connection with a letter Ned wrote and sent to the newspaper for publication. The editor found it in his mail yesterday afternoon, but owing to Ned's death, he did not wish to publish it without my consent. He left the letter with me, and that is why I sent for you. Here it is."

From a nearby table she lifted a folded paper which she handed to Nathan. The latter took it, and as he

began to read his eyes opened wide in amazement. It was Ned Preston's complete confession of his theft of the bonds! He had evidently written and mailed it during the morning of the day of his death. Nathan could hardly believe his senses. Carefully he read every word, and some things which hitherto had been a mystery were now explained. So Ned had at last really confessed his crime! What a sensation it would have made. But it was not too late yet. A great longing came into Nathan's heart to see that confession in print and to have his own name vindicated. It was only just that such a thing should be done. After long years of suffering it was but right that the world should know that he was an innocent man. His heart beat fast as he thought of all it would mean, and his hand holding the paper trembled. Helen, watching, surmised the struggle, but remained silent.

Presently Nathan rose to his feet and paced rapidly up and down the room. What should he do? What a revenge it would be to allow that confession to be published. The animal nature within him demanded it. Then suddenly, as if a voice spoke, there came into his mind the greater revenge upon which he had determined. He stopped short and glanced at the woman gazing thoughtfully into the fire. And for her sake, too, he had resolved to be a man far removed from the mere brute creation. For years she had inspired him, and he had tried to be true. He must not fail now in the time of temptation. Swiftly he stepped toward her and held out the paper.

"Helen, do you want this published?" he asked.

"Only that your name might be cleared," was the

low reply. "It should be published in justice to you. Do as you like about it."

At once Nathan turned to the fire-place, slowly tore the paper to bits, and threw the pieces into the glowing coals. The storm raged outside, and the ashes of the burnt paper whirled up the chimney. But in Nathan's heart there was a peace, the peace of victory after battle, the triumph of the spirit over the beast. The Master Revenge was now complete.

CHAPTER 31

After Long Years

WINTER at length gave place to spring and spring to summer. Again the air was redolent with flowers, and the songs of birds and the buzz of bees were heard on all sides. It was a Saturday morning early in July as Nathan stepped from his house and looked around. The sun had already risen and was dispelling the last traces of fog from the mirror-like river. He felt like a giant after his refreshing sleep, and eagerly he drank in great draughts of the invigorating air. It was good to be alive on such a morning, so he thought, as he stood there watching the beauties of Nature.

Nathan had changed outwardly since Christmas Eve when he had made his hard struggle through the storm. This was due to the removal of his beard, thus making his strong, smooth-shaven face a striking contrast to his former appearance. His neighbors had been surprised at first, and several had passed him by without a sign of recognition. Hitherto he had resembled a man of sixty, but now he seemed much younger than the forty years which was his real age. He had not met Helen since doing away with his beard, but he felt sure that she would be pleased at the change.

Ever since Christmas Nathan had been busy and the time had sped rapidly by. Day by day he had worked at the church, and at night he had read and thought

in his comfortable room. But always before him was the vision of the completed church and the day when it would be consecrated. Often he mused over the past and how wonderfully all things had turned out. He had suffered much, but he knew that he had gained a great deal as well. If only he had Helen with him, his cup of happiness would be full. He had written several letters to her during the winter, and she had always replied. But apart from that he had heard nothing about her. He longed for the day when she would return to the country, and then he could see her again. He cherished the hope that the love she once had for him might still be strong. He knew that she cared for him, but whether she loved him as he loved her was another matter.

Nathan was much elated on this beautiful Saturday, for the church was to be consecrated the next day. The new organ, given by Helen, had arrived the night before and was at the wharf. Peter Martin was to haul it down, and he was to assist. This took most of the morning, and they had to call upon a couple of neighbors to help them. The organ was removed from its crate outside the church, and when it was placed in position near the choir seats, Nathan viewed it with greater interest than did the other men. It meant more to him than it did to them, for it was Helen's gift, "In memory of the past."

During the afternoon Nathan busied himself about the church. There were numerous little things to be looked after, and he wished to have everything in readiness for the morrow. At times he would stop near the organ, and look upon it with a rapt expression upon his face. How new and bright were the keys. Helen would be the first to touch them, for he

felt sure that she would be present at the service and would play. Whether she had arrived from the city, he did not know, although he had written to her concerning the important event.

About the middle of the afternoon the Parson came, and as he entered the building he paused just inside and looked intently around. Nathan was fastening the last book-rack in place, and he lifted his head to see who it was. Noticing the look of joy upon the clergyman's face, he remained silent and bent again to his task. Mr. Westmore walked slowly up the aisle until he reached the organ. He felt its smooth surface, and examined it most carefully. He was standing there when Nathan at length came and stood by his side.

"It's a nice organ, Mr. Westmore," he remarked.

"Wonderful! wonderful! And everything is wonderful! I feel that I must be dreaming. Never did I expect to have such a church as this built here, and we owe it all to you." He turned his grateful eyes upon his companion. "The Lord must have sent you to us, Mr. Stone. Never again will I doubt His goodness."

"I am glad that you like everything," Nathan replied. "This organ is the last thing to be added, and it is the best of all. I hope that Mrs. Preston will be here to-morrow. She should be the first one to play upon it."

Nathan mentioned this, hoping that he would learn whether Helen had arrived from the city.

"She will be here, and has promised to play at the service," Mr. Westmore replied. "She came this morning, and was over to the rectory shortly afterwards to find out how the church is getting along.

She was delighted when I told her of your good work, and that everything is in readiness.

Nathan was satisfied at what he heard. Helen had arrived and would play the organ! He was almost like a boy in his exuberance as he showed the clergyman around the church, pointing out several pieces of special work. He even took him into the tower where the new bell was hanging.

"It has a sweeter tone than the old one," he explained. "Just wait until you hear it to-morrow."

"I liked the old one," the Parson replied. "For long years it called the people together. It was here when I came. But now everything is new, so I suppose a new clergyman will be wanted as well. It is only natural. I am getting old-fashioned, and find it rather hard to keep up with new notions."

"I do not believe the people want any such change, Mr. Westmore," Nathan protested, moved by these words, and the wistful expression in the old man's eyes. "Your heart is young and you have the love and respect of all. I am certain that they would resent another man in your place."

"Do you think so? I have been here for thirty years, and it would almost break my heart to leave. Why, I have baptized and married so many in this parish that they all seem like my own family. I want them yet, and I hope they want me. Anyway, I shall go on and try to do my duty and commit everything to Him who oversees all."

That evening, after supper, Nathan again returned to the church. Although there was really nothing left for him to do, he found it difficult to stay away. He liked to stand some distance off, gaze upon the graceful building, or go inside, seat himself in one of the

pews and look around. But the organ was his chief attraction this evening, and he pictured Helen sitting there, playing the hymns and chants. He knew that to-morrow would be a wonderful day for them both, and he was very anxious for it to arrive.

At last he reluctantly left the church, closed the door, and walked slowly along the path leading to his own house. He had gone about half way, when, happening to glance out upon the river, he saw a small boat with one person on board coming upstream, quite close to the shore. He knew that it was Helen, and in another minute he was speeding across the field straight for the landing place. He was standing there when the boat grated upon the gravel. A smile wreathed the rower's face as she drew in her oars, picked up an armful of flowers from the bottom of the boat, and stepped lightly out.

"You have been spying upon me, Nathan," she charged as she held out her hand, although her face belied her words.

Nathan took her hand in his and held it fast. His heart was beating wildly, and he was afraid that he might make a fool of himself.

"I wasn't spying upon you, Helen," he defended. "But, my! I'm glad to see you."

For a few seconds they looked silently at each other. Then the woman's eyes slowly lowered until they rested upon the flowers enfolded in her left arm.

"You look just like you used to, Nathan, before y-you went away," she said. " You remind me of that last night we stood by the gate."

"And I feel just the same, Helen, although years have passed since then. You remember how you played and sang to me then. Won't you do it again

to-night? Your new organ is in the church, and it is a very fine one."

Along the path leading from the river to the church the two walked side by side. They said but little, for words were unnecessary. They understood each other, and their hearts were filled with a sweet peace. And there before them stood the church, bathed in the glory of the westering sun. Helen paused and looked upon it with glowing eyes.

"Oh, how beautiful!" she exclaimed. "What a picture amidst its setting of noble trees."

"I am glad that you like it, Helen," Nathan replied. "But let us go inside. I want your opinion of my work there."

When once across the threshold, Helen stopped and looked around with approving eyes.

"I can hardly believe that all this has been done in such a short time," she said. "It seems like a dream. But I know it is real for there is the organ which I chose myself."

"Play something for me, Helen," Nathan urged. "I want to hear you sing."

"Let me rest first, for I am tired after that row. And, besides, I want to collect my thoughts and enjoy this beautiful building."

She sat down in the nearest pew, and it was but natural that Nathan should take his place by her side.

"I am glad to see you so happy to-night, Helen," he began. "Isn't it strange that we should be sitting here together. And I wish to explain that but for you this church would not be standing here now. You were my inspiration during all of those terrible years of captivity, although, perhaps, you never realized it."

"I thought you had forgotten me, Nathan," was

the low reply. "When I received that letter, all light and hope went out of my life for a time. I believed that you had sent it, for never once did I suspect Ned of doing such a despicable thing. Oh, if I had only known!"

"You would have waited for me, Helen?"

"Waited! Why need you ask that? My heart was almost broken when they took you away. But never for a minute did I doubt your innocence until I received that letter. It made me desperate when I learned that the man I trusted and loved had committed such a deed, and wrote his confession to me in such a cold and indifferent manner."

"You hated and despised me after that, I suppose?"

"Not altogether. For a time I lived in the memory of those happy days when we were together. The thought of you was constantly in my mind, and it was only after insistent urgings and pleadings did I consent to marry Ned."

"But you didn't love him, Helen?" There was an intense eagerness in Nathan's voice.

"No. Neither did he love me. I cannot understand why I married him. It was a wild despair that made me reckless, I guess. That is the only way I can account for what I did. Then when I regained my senses, it was too late."

"Ned was good to you, though, was he not?"

"So far as money was concerned I never wanted for anything. But that was all. He was very little with me, and hardly ever stayed home at night. I led a lonely life until my little ones came, and upon them I bestowed my love."

"And you heard nothing about me, Helen?"

"Not a word after I received that letter. I asked

no questions, and no one ever alluded to you. But I thought of you very often, and never omitted your name from my prayers. I had the strange feeling that we would meet again some day, and that all would be well. I cannot account for it."

"Did you recognize me that day I repaired the fence?" Nathan asked.

"No. But there was something in your eyes which reminded me of you. I thought it was only a foolish notion at the time."

"But Ned knew me at once."

"He did, although he said nothing to me. But he spread the report about you and I heard that. Then when Ned went from bad to worse, and I knew that you were so near yet I could not unburden my heart to you, I was in despair. For a time I thought I would go out of my mind."

"I know, Helen, for I saw you one night pacing up and down your room, as if in great trouble."

"You saw me, Nathan?"

"Yes, as I was passing your house during a heavy storm. I had seen Ned at the hotel with a strange woman, and my heart was filled with an intense anger. As I walked home, I saw a light in your house, so could not resist the temptation of looking in at the window, thinking I might catch a glimpse of your face. It was wrong, I know, but love compels a man to do strange things at times. And, Helen, loves makes me bold now."

Impulsively he placed his right arm around her, drew her close, and bending his head he kissed her.

"Our love for each other is no mushroom thing," he continued. "It was born long ago, and has been

tested through years of terrible trials. Let us forget the past and think only of the present and the future."

Like a bird wearied after a long, hard flight, Helen allowed herself to rest within his encompassing arm. They told of their love for each other, for the heart is always young where love reigns.

"Play for me now, Helen," Nathan at length requested. "Music such as you alone can produce must be the accompaniment to my great happiness. And upon your organ, too, in this church."

Together they walked up the aisle, and Helen took her seat at the organ, with Nathan standing by her side. For a while she played several of the old familiar hymns, one of which she sang. She then drifted off to tunes of bygone days, now considered old-fashioned. But they brought back sweet memories of the past, and thrilled the man standing there. To him the beautiful woman had not changed with the years. She was the same who had so often played for him before. He stooped and kissed her, and upon her face there shone a light more wonderful and intense than that which came through the west windows. Helen ceased playing, and her hands rested idly upon the silent keys.

"Play me one more piece," Nathan urged. "I want 'The Long, Long Trail.' "

Again Helen pressed the keys, and as they sprang into music, she began to sing the opening words. When she came to the chorus, Nathan joined her.

"There's a long, long trail a-winding
Into the land of my dreams,
Where the nightingales are singing,
And a white moon beams.
There's a long, long night of waiting

Until my dreams all come true,
In the day that I'll be going down
That long, long trail with you."

Slowly the light in the church faded, and as Helen and Nathan left the building the stillness of evening enfolded them in its peaceful embrace. The glory of the placid river spread out before them as they once more stood at the landing-place. Helen stepped on board, but she did not pick up the oars as she had always done in the past. She had no need to do so now, for Nathan was in charge. Then slowly across the water they moved through deepening twilight. Face to face they sat, soul responding to soul, their hearts overflowing with a love made perfect by long years of trial and endurance.

THE END

A STORY OF REVENGE TURNED INSIDE OUT

The MASTER REVENGE

By

H. A. CODY

Author of "The King's Arrow," "The Trail of the Golden Horn," "The Frontiersman," etc.

In this new book by Mr. Cody we have a story as splendid as "The Frontiersman." It is a romance of the Northwest, but the location is only a fitting background for the drama enacted. Big, kind, beloved by the people, Nathan was nevertheless an ex-convict. For twelve long years he had been imprisoned for another man's crime. When he was released this man had married the girl Nathan loved. Nathan wanted revenge and deserved it. But such are the strange workings of Providence that although he got "the master revenge" it was not what he had hoped for, but more.

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